The Characters of MDZS Watching the Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation

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The Characters of MDZS Watching the Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation

by emma_screams

Summary

What happens when a suspicious letter was sent to all the clans, inviting them to an appointed location to learn about the truth of thirteen years ago and now? Will the Yiling Patriarch finally get the justice he seeks? Will Hanguang-Jun lose some of his regret? Will Jiang Cheng find the peace he desperately needs? And will the other Sect Leaders finally ~~realize what a piece of shit they are~~ get the faceslapping they deserve?

But most importantly, will Wei Wuxian allow a drunk Lan Zhan to be viewed by the public?

Find out in the epic series of the characters watching the Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation!
Spanish Translation,
Korean Translation

Notes

I originally thought of making them watch The Untamed but I wanted to reread the novel for a future fic so I thought, why not make them “watch” the novel instead 😂 so this was born~ yay!

Before anyone jumps at my throat for copy pasting the entire novel, I'm not going to do that. I'm going to summarize and reword a lot of the events and what not since I'm assuming yall read the novel already (why else are you here). Also, I’m going to be mixing in a lot of scenes and dialogue from the audio drama, the manhua, the donghua (and maybe the live action series too) cos some things relate better visually than on text.

and that's it. enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes

Prologue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

One auspicious morning, a certain Yiling Patriarch was lounging against the trunk of a tree, hands supporting the back of his head and eyes closed as he basked under the sun outside of Jingshi. A scurry of rabbits hopped unobtrusively around him, particularly avoiding his area as if waking him from his nap might mean another afternoon of aggressive cuddling.

However, one white rabbit sat comfortably in the spacious folds of Wei Wuxian's lap, completely content with itself.

While the scene looked picturesque, it didn't last long until someone broke the peace.

"Senior Wei! Senior Wei!"

Wei Wuxian groaned, lifting a lazy lid open as one of the Lan Sect's disciples called out to him.

"Jingyi, isn't it against the rules to shout and run in the Cloud Recesses?" He smirked, teasing the young teen.

Lan Jingyi flushed, "I wasn't running, I was brisk walking. And it's an urgent matter, Senior Wei! Hanguang-Jun told me to bring you to the Hanshi."

Wei Wuxian sat up a little straighter and placed the bunny from his lap to the ground, "Did something happen?"

"During our lessons, a letter flew out of nowhere and landed in front of Hanguang-Jun. After reading it, he asked Sizhui to tell Clan Leader that he needed to see him. Then he left to get Master Lan Qiren too."

"Alright. I'm coming." Wei Wuxian patted down his black robes and made his way with Lan Jingyi.

They found Lan Sizhui pacing outside, looking troubled.

"A-Yuan! How's my favorite radish plant?"

Lan Sizhui shot him a wry smile and bowed, "Senior Wei, I'm doing fine. Hanguang-Jun is waiting for you inside."

Wei Wuxian nodded. The two young Lan disciples watched as the man walked into the room and slid the door behind him.

Lan Sizhui sighed, "I wonder what's going on."

Lan Jingyi nodded, “Yeah. Did you hear anything?”

“It seems to have something to do with the Burial Mounds.”

Lan Jingyi looked shocked, “The Burial Mounds? Something happened there again? Tsk. And I thought we’ve heard the last of that place.”

Lan Sizhui shook his head, “Hopefully, it’s not too problematic. The issue with Jin Guangyao just ended six months ago. None of the other clans should be stirring up trouble now.”

The other youth shrugged, turning his gaze back on the doors of Hanshi.

Inside, Wei Wuxian bowed before sitting beside Hanguang-Jun. Lan Xichen and Lin Qiren were already sitting on the other side of the table; on the surface of it laid an innocently folded letter.

“So I heard there’s something urgent about a letter?” Wei Wuxian queried even though his eyes were on said object already. He reached out to take it and no one stopped him from reading the contents inside.

Wei Wuxian scrunched his brows.

Seeing his expression, Lan Xichen began, “It seems like this anonymous sender knows something that we don't about the first Burial Mound siege thirteen years ago. They’re inviting us to meet in the Burial Mounds before sundown if we want to know the truth. Wangji, do you have any idea what this could be about?”

Lan Wangji narrowed his eyes, "No."

“Have you checked for any curses or spells on the thing?” Lan Qiren asked.

Lan Wangji nodded, “I checked before reading it. Nothing.”

“Hmm, I didn’t detect anything either and I have no clue what they want to reveal. Well, there’s only one way to find out, right Lan Zhan?” Wei Wuxian grinned, turning to Lan Wangji with bright eyes. Lan Wangji stared at him deeply, eyes soft even though no one else besides Lan Xichen could see it. He nodded to Wei Wuxian’s delight.

“You don’t mean you want to go back there?” Lan Qiren interrupted with a scowl.

“What else are we supposed to do? I mean, we could ignore the invitation but I want to know what this person has to say in front of us.” Wei Wuxian leaned against Lan Wangji’s shoulder, looking unconcerned. This anonymous sender mentioned he knew the truth of what happened thirteen years ago which meant it had something to do with him. Either this was an enemy who wanted to slander his name further or a friend who really had secrets to tell. Wei Wuxian wouldn’t know unless they agreed to meet at the appointed location. It would be remiss of the Yiling Patriarch to not give this anonymous sender the opportunity to show off when he or she made the effort to send them this mysterious letter.

“It could be a trap.” The older man argued, stroking his beard.

“No one could harm Hanguang-Jun if I’m around.” Wei Wuxian proudly declared, looping an arm around Lan Wangji’s.

Lan Wangji held his hand, speaking in kind, “No harm will come to Wei Ying too.”

Wei Wuxian melted, immediately feeling the urge to kiss this man. Sadly, that’d have to wait until they were alone. Instead, he sat closer to Lan Wangji and cuddled against him, almost toeing the line of disrespect in front of his elders. “Of course, Lan Zhan. I trust you.”

Lan Qiren sighed at this hopeless pair of lovers while Lan Xichen gazed at them in amusement.

After arranging one of the Clan elders to supervise the sect while they were gone, they, along with a few disciples, headed for Yiling on their swords (Wei Wuxian comfortably in Hanguang-Jun's arms) and made their way towards the Burial Mounds.

They were unsurprised to find other sects with their disciples standing by the rocky pathway, arguing amongst each other. The letter had been worded in a way to imply that they weren't the only ones who'd received an invitation. Though the amount of people who came did surprise Wei Wuxian a bit.

"I say it's a trap!"

"Then why are you even here?"

"To warn you all its a trap! That Yiling Patriarch may be up to something after all! We shouldn't have ever lowered our guards around him."

“But isn’t he innocent already? He’s staying in the Cloud Recesses with Hanguang-Jun.”

“Who said he’s innocent just because Jin Guangyao turned out to be worse than him? Don’t forget what he did all those years ago that got a lot of cultivators killed! Whoever this sender is wants to reveal this truth to us!”

“I agree!”

“You’re just spouting nonsense!”

"Look, it's the Gusu Lan sect!"

Cultivators dressed in varying colors turned to greet the Gusu Lan Sect who were all dressed in their white and pale blue robes. The most infamous among them was a man in black and red, hair tied in a high ponytail and a flute strapped to his belt. He grinned winningly at all the eyes on him.

"Come on now, I know I'm handsome but you don't have to stare so obviously at me." Wei Wuxian snickered, one hand shyly covering the lower half of his face. He crowed inwardly in joy when he caught sight of Jiang Cheng scowling at him, a face Jin Ling was similarly making, though less pronounced.

Nie Huaisang had also arrived with his sect, fanning himself while looking as if he wanted to be anywhere but here. Ever since Jin Guangyao's death, Wei Wuxian didn't allow himself to get fooled by Nie Huaisang's innocent act anymore. He had an inkling that the sender might be him or had something about him if his nervous expression was anything to go by.

Almost everyone from the previous Burial Mounds incident were here except for the obvious exclusion of the Moling Su Sect led by Su She.

Suddenly, one of the disciples of a smaller sect shouted, "Wei Wuxian, whatever you're up to, we won't have any part of it!"

"Yeah, just because you have the Gusu Lan Sect's backing doesn't mean any of us will lower our guards around you!" A female cultivator added fiercely.

Wei Wuxian almost burst out laughing. Oh how paranoid cultivators' minds were when in regards to the Yiling Patriarch.

He raised a flippant hand as he moved through the crowd that parted for him, "I'm too lazy to deal with you people. If you didn't come here for the truth or whatever, I'm not going to stop you from leaving. In fact, I welcome it! Come on, Lan Zhan!"

Wei Wuxian began his trek up the Burial Mounds with Lan Wangji right beside him. Hanguang-Jun's golden eyes swept over the surrounding cultivators, his gaze deep and chilling. There was no doubt in anyone's minds that if they tried to mess with Wei Wuxian, they'd had to get through Hanguang-Jun first.

The rest of Gusu Lan Sect followed after them, then the Qinghe Nie Sect, the Lanling Jin Sect, and lastly, the Yunmeng Jiang Sect.

With the Four Great Clans on their way to the Burial Mounds, the smaller sects glanced at each other for a brief moment before following as well. No matter how much they shouted and reasoned to themselves that it was a bad idea (a trap!), their curiosity still won out.

Who didn't want to hear more gossip about the Yiling Patriarch? Maybe all the rumors they'd heard thirteen years ago were actually true? This was the only time they could confirm it!

Standing at the opening of the cave where he used to live, Wei Wuxian surveyed the area, trying to sense another presence with them.

Lan Wangji glanced around, "No one's here."

Wei Wuxian nodded and slowly stepped inside with the Lan disciples holding their swords out in front of them. Meanwhile, Lan Xichen, Lan Qiren and Lan Wangji held their own at their sides, perpetually on guard.

"Wei-xiong, what do you think is going on? Do you know who the sender is?" Nie Huaisang suddenly sidled up to his side, whispering with his fan covering his mouth.

Wei Wuxian glanced at him from the corner of his eye, "I thought you might have some knowledge about it, Clan Leader Nie?"

“No, no. I don’t know. I don’t know anything this time. I swear.” Nie Huaisang said, fanning himself rapidly.

Wei Wuxian sighed, about to say something when he heard Jiang Cheng scold, “Jin Ling, why did you come? Shouldn’t you be back in Carp Tower organizing your sect? You shouldn’t be here.”

Jin Ling, who was soon going to be the Clan Leader of Lanling Jin Sect after Jin Guangyao’s death, flushed and he angrily replied, “Uncle, I received an invitation too and besides, thirteen years ago… thirteen years ago was when my mother died. I-I want to know if there’s something more about the battle in Nightless City too.”

Jiang Cheng seemed to freeze at the mention of his sister’s death but then he scowled and smacked the back of Jin Ling’s head, “What more do you need to know?! It’s not something kids should find out until they’re older!”

“I’m going to be Clan Leader soon, Uncle! Y-You can’t treat me like a kid forever.” Jin Ling rebutted.

“You—!”

“Ey, ey. That’s enough.” Wei Wuxian appeared in the middle of them and slung an arm around both of their shoulders. “We shouldn’t be fighting amongst ourselves. Come on, let’s just find that anonymous sender, listen to what he or she has to say then leave. Yeah?”

Jiang Cheng stared at him hard, before he brushed his arm off, “Whatever.” He walked away to stand by his sect.

Wei Wuxian watched his back and shook his head. After patting Jin Ling’s shoulder, he moved to stand beside Hanguang-Jun who immediately held his hand as though he knew Wei Wuxian needed it.

Smiling, Wei Wuxian looked left and right briefly and after making certain there was no one watching them, he gave Lan Zhan a peck on the cheek. There was no expression on the man’s face but Wei Wuxian could clearly see his ears redden from the act. Wei Wuxian chuckled into his other hand.

“Clan Leader, there doesn’t seem to be anyone around here. Should we leave?” One of the Lan disciples came over to report. Lan Xichen furrowed his brows, thinking on what to do next. The only reason he agreed to go out of his seclusion was because he wanted to know if A-Yao had done anything more that he didn’t tell them before his death.

If this all just turned into a big joke to fool around with the other sects (although the method of the letter arriving to them was mysterious), then he could only blame himself for being too hasty and bring the Gusu Lan sect back.

However, as soon as the last person from the smaller sects stepped into the cave, there was a sudden noise and the earth began to move under them. Some disciples fell from the

unexpected phenomenon while others tried to steady themselves, looking around vigilantly for an attack.

Lan Wangji held Wei Wuxian around the waist, keeping him from falling.

But everyone soon realized that the entrance they'd just entered had been closed shut by a huge boulder.

"We're trapped!" One cultivator shouted in panic.

"Move aside," Jiang Cheng stepped up as he released Zidian. He swung his arm down and struck the boulder with the whip but as if there was spiritual power wrapped around it, the whip bounced back, nearly hitting some of the cultivators behind him.

Jiang Cheng looked surprised, staring down at Zidian, "What the—?"

Before anyone could react, Lan Wangji had jumped over and sent Bichen sailing towards the rock. Just as it did with Zidian, the sword couldn't strike it and Lan Wangji called the sword back into its sheath.

The cultivators who saw this grew pale. How could both Clan Leader Jiang and Hanguang-Jun not strike a dent at an unsuspecting boulder? Something wasn't right!

Wei Wuxian came over to inspect the strange boulder. He pressed a hand against it and closed his eyes. For a moment, the other sects forgot about Wei Wuxian's identity and they watched him with bated breath for his judgment.

"This spiritual power… it isn't resentful. I don't feel any malice from it." Wei Wuxian stroked his chin contemplatively.

Lan Xichen played a few tunes with his flute, Liebing. After a few notes, he opened his eyes and agreed with Wei Wuxian's words, "This isn't no normal cultivator's doing. If it could stand against Clan Leader Jiang's Zidian and Wangji's Bichen, then they must be very powerful."

"So whatever hell does this cultivator want from us?" Jiang Cheng scowled.

"For us to know the truth." Wei Wuxian responded, his back to him. He turned around with a grin and a glint in his eye, "Isn't that what we're here for?"

Suddenly, one sect leader of a smaller clan commented suspiciously, "You seem to know something we don't, huh Wei Wuxian?"

"If you're implying that I'm smarter than you, then you're absolutely right." Wei Wuxian cheekily replied.

"You—!"

The younger disciples behind him who had come to know Wei Wuxian during the events in Yi City, burst out laughing, making him lose face even more.

"Wei Ying." Lan Zhan said, subtly telling his lover to play nice. It wouldn't do to anger a sect, even if they were a small one, while trapped in here. They had bigger issues to face.

Wei Wuxian immediately gravitated towards him. "Okay, okay, I'll stop Lan Zhan. I'll be good." He scratched Lan Zhan under his chin, eyes fixed on him, and Wei Wuxian smiled triumphantly when a corner of Lan Zhan's lips turned up into a small smile.

Jiang Cheng rolled his eyes at the couple's dog food. He didn't come up here just to watch the two lovebirds go at it. Although if anyone asked him the reason why he did, he'd refuse to answer.

"Hanguang-Jun, Senior Wei! There's something here." Lan Sizhui's call brought the two older cultivators towards the area of the blood pool.

Lan Sizhui pointed at a circular device sitting innocently on the stone table.

"That's strange. I don't remember a stone table being here before." Wei Wuxian pondered as Lan Wangji eyed the item suspiciously. As he was focused on the device, he didn't notice that Wei Wuxian had leaned over to touch it until it was too late.

"Wei Yi—!"

Suddenly, bright light filled the room and everyone cried out in surprise. They shut their eyes tight until the light gradually dimmed to tolerable levels.

"Wei Wuxian, are you an idiot? You don't just touch something suspicious without checking it first." Jiang Cheng harshly reprimanded, rubbing an eye to get his sight back.

"What's that?!" Jin Ling exclaimed, blinking his eyes open.

In front of them was a raised projection of a square-shaped screen and on it were the words:

The Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation

All eyes immediately landed on Wei Wuxian.

He chuckled nervously and scratched the back of his head with Chenqing.

"I knew it! I knew this had something to do with you, Yiling Patriarch! Out with it, what do you want with us?"

"Maybe he's trying to eliminate us now that Jin Guangyao is out of the way."

"We won't let you do it!"

Wei Wuxian rolled his eyes, not even deigning to turn around while responding, "If you guys have already forgotten, we're all trapped in here, including me."

"This could just be a trap of your own making! You've been living here for years, who knows what contraptions you have set up."

The other cultivators began to agree and speculated some more. Wei Wuxian was starting to regret coming here. Maybe the sender was an enemy and just wanted him to die by recreating the third Burial Mound siege.

Lan Wangji silently stood beside him but he had a tight grip on his sword, prepared to fight against anyone who dared harm Wei Ying.

Lan Sizhui glanced worriedly over the crowd while Jin Ling's brows were furrowed and he clutched his sword beside him. Jiang Cheng stood imposing and silent, eyes narrowed at the people bad mouthing Wei Wuxian.

Then there was the sound of tiny rocks falling above them and everyone instantly quieted down.

Wei Wuxian glanced up and to his surprise, he found Wen Ning trying to stick himself as close to the rocky surface as possible.

“Wen Ning?!”

“Uncle Ning!”

His and Sizhui’s call overlapped.

Realizing that he’d been discovered, Wen Ning jumped down from the ceiling and bowed, “Master Wei!”

Wei Wuxian was bewildered by his appearance, “What are you doing here? No, how did you get here?”

“I-I,” Wen Ning stuttered, glancing at him nervously before he shot a look at Lan Sizhui and looked back down, “I was following you guys up here. I wanted to speak with A-Yuan but then I noticed all of you leaving in a hurry and decided to come with.”

Wei Wuxian shook his head and chuckled. “Oh well, since you’re here, Wen Ning, why don’t you try hitting that boulder blocking the entrance.”

Wen Ning agreed and immediately dashed towards it. Some cultivators who’d been keeping quiet exclaimed in surprise as the Ghost General passed by them so fast.

The moment Wen Ning hit the boulder with a fist, the cave shook slightly but other than that, nothing happened.

“I’m sorry, Master Wei. I couldn’t break it.” Wen Ning apologized and bowed. Seeing such a docile side of the Ghost General, many cultivators were wide-eyed and stunned. Didn’t the rumors say that Wen Ning was a vicious resentful corpse that would kill anyone in sight? Where was that horrible monster in front of them?

However, other cultivators, who couldn’t reconcile with the fact that the Ghost General was just standing among them, shouted, “Maybe if we killed this corpse, the Yiling Patriarch might finally drop the act and free us from his trap!”

One brave soul roared and jumped towards Wen Ning, flying at him with his sword out. Wei Wuxian snorted and stood back to watch. Wen Ning could take care of himself.

But before the cultivator could reach him, he suddenly dropped from the air and spat out blood. Everyone stared at him in shock. The cultivator tried to wield his sword but it was like it was acting against him. He paled and exclaimed, “M-My spiritual powers are gone.”

Everyone suddenly had a bad premonition in their hearts. They all tried using their spiritual powers, but as expected, it was gone just like six months ago in the second Burial Mound siege.

“It can’t be!”

“What’s happening!?”

“Did somebody play the Collection of Turmoil while we went up here again?”

“Now you definitely can’t blame this on me!” Wei Wuxian defended with hands raised in the air, “We arrived to the Burial Mounds last and walked into the cave first, all without playing music.”

Before anyone could begin speculating the culprit, a loud noise like that of a thousand troops cheering resonated throughout the whole cave. It frightened everyone to draw their swords in random directions even though they knew it’d be useless.

However, nothing was coming for them. Instead, it seemed like the sound was coming from the strange device on the stone table.

Everyone watched, entranced, as the screen that had once been displaying *The Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation* earlier changed into a set of pictures that were moving. A crowd of people, most likely cultivators, were raising their swords in jubilance in front of a great fire with smoke filling the sky. As they cheered, voices spoke over them that sounded like people gossiping in the streets.

“Great news! Wei Wuxian is dead!”

The said man scowled, “What do you mean dead? I’m right here?”

However, Lan Wangji, who was staring at the scene with grave eyes, held Wei Wuxian’s hand and whispered, “Not now. In the past.”

Wei Wuxian’s eyes widened as he understood.

“The Yiling Patriarch is finally dead? Who could have killed him?”

“Who other than his shidi, Jiang Cheng! He put an end to his own relative for the greater good. Jiang Cheng led the Four Clans of Yunmeng Jiang, Lanling Jin, Gusu Lan, and Qinghe Nie to destroy his den in the Burial Mounds.” As the gossipers spoke, the scene displayed the Burial Mounds in ruins, houses destroyed, and pots and tables broken on the ground.

Soon, it was clear to most of them what they were watching. They were confused as to why they were being shown something so long ago, especially on a topic that everyone already knew about. However, they couldn't help but watch as they were enchanted by these moving pictures that seemed to be telling the Yiling Patriarch's story in a very captivating way.

Having been too young to experience the aftermath of the battle themselves, Lan Sizhui, Lan Jingyi, and the rest of the younger disciples felt horrified watching the screen. They occasionally sent glances towards Wei Wuxian who was squinting at the images, unmoved. Jin Ling was looking between his uncle and Wei Wuxian, feeling strange inside as the voices continued.

"But the Yiling Patriarch and the Four Clans were allies during the Sunshot Campaign, right?"

"You call that being allies? If not for the previous Yunmeng Jiang Clan Leader adopting and teaching Wei Wuxian, he would have been a beggar living on the streets, causing mayhem as bold as the ones these days. The head of the Jiang clan even raised him as his own dear son, but what did he do? He defected and became the enemy of the cultivation world, bringing shame to the clan and even leading to their near-extermination. He really is a prime example of ungratefully biting the hand that feeds him!"

"What an ungrateful bastard!"

The scene continued to show cultivators fighting against the zombies Wei Wuxian had made to protect the Burial Mounds but it was pointless. The place the Wen remnants used to live was burned and razed to the ground.

The gossiping man went on to complain about Jiang Cheng's actions for allowing Wei Wuxian to live this long. Had it been a more sensible cultivator, he would have killed the Yiling Patriarch the moment he defected, then examine the disciples of the sect again to avoid another mad one committing these atrocious acts. He went on to say, "Who cares about the so called 'considerations' for a childhood friend?"

The longer he listened, the tighter Jiang Cheng's grip grew on his sword. He glared fiercely at the screen, wishing that he could shut those voices up with a strike of Zidian but the whip wouldn't answer to his call now.

Wei Wuxian gave a passing glance at his martial brother before he looked away, feeling conflicted inside. He knew it was his fault that people complained about Jiang Cheng's capabilities since he hadn't been able to control the Yiling Patriarch from defecting and committing plenty of "atrocious acts". But it was the best Wei Wuxian could think of to protect the Wen remnants while making sure that the Jiang clan wouldn't be held responsible for his actions.

A woman's voice suddenly spoke up, "That's merely hearsay. Although Jiang Cheng was one of the main forces, he didn't give Wei Wuxian the final blow. Because he cultivates a twisted and dark path, Wei Wuxian's powers had backfired and he was ripped to pieces by his own ghost soldiers!"

Right after those words were spoken, the image zoomed into the fires and revealed a figure who looked to be in great torture. Although the older cultivators had a vague idea of the person being shown on screen, Lan Wangji knew clear as day who that person was and his heartbeat accelerated.

Then, everybody heard the sound of an ear-splitting scream filled with great agony, followed by the sounds of flesh tearing apart. Although most of them had been there to see the death of the Yiling Patriarch, none of them could suppress the shivers that swept down their spines hearing it a second time. No one wished to experience a death so gruesome.

Meanwhile, the younger disciples were completely unprepared. They paled and cringed over the horrible sounds, looking away from the screen and wishing they hadn't heard it all. How could someone as happy and chivalrous as the Wei Wuxian they knew experience something so terrible in his first life? Even though they'd grown up hearing stories about the evil acts of the Yiling Patriarch, they couldn't reconcile the same person with the man before them.

Lan Sizhui, in particular, seemed to be at the point of tears. His Xian-Gege had experienced such hardships protecting his family's clan. His chest was wrought with heavy and stifling emotions that he didn't know how to express. Wen Ning, who hadn't been there for Wei Wuxian's final moments, looked down, his face stoic but his hands at his sides were clenched very tightly.

But Wei Wuxian himself wasn't bothered about his own death. What he was most concerned about was Lan Zhan.

He was staring at the man beside him who had blanched the moment he heard Wei Wuxian scream. Thankfully, the image had faded to black to hide the more horrible aspects of his death though the sounds left no room to the imagination. The hand he was holding even began to tremble.

"Shh, Lan Zhan, it's okay. I'm here." Wei Wuxian murmured into the taller man's ear, sticking very close to his side.

Lan Wangji seemed to snap out of whatever daze he was in and he stared intensely at Wei Wuxian before he brought the shorter male into his embrace. He breathed in his familiar smell and whispered, "Wei Ying." The simple call of his name seemed to carry a thousand burdens.

Wei Wuxian hugged him back tighter, wishing he could take away all of the man's sorrow and pain from thirteen years ago.

Lan Xichen glanced at the couple with sad eyes, knowing his brother wouldn't be able to handle such a scene about someone he deeply loved. It was a good thing Wei Wuxian was by his side now or else he wouldn't know how Lan Wangji would have coped.

The image on screen suddenly showed an inn with people inside drinking and chatting as usual. A certain group seemed to be the main attraction as they loudly discussed the Yiling Patriarch's demise. One man laughed and banged the table, "Ha, that's his own fault for walking such a twisted and forbidden path! The ghost soldiers that he created were like

unleashed dogs, biting everyone that they came across. It serves him right to be chewed to death; that's karma for you!"

Hearing these words, Wei Wuxian winced a little, muttering, "Why does everyone have to relate things to dogs?"

Lan Wangji tightened his hold on Wei Wuxian and glared at the screen. Although he couldn't do anything about these rumors, he did his best to avoid them as much as possible so he wouldn't end up attacking countless people whose sole crime was hating on the Yiling Patriarch.

Lan Jingyi frowned and looked at Wen Ning, "But the Ghost General isn't anything like the rumors say. These people are just spouting bull—I mean, nonsense!" He quickly changed his language, coughing a little as he remembered that Master and Clan Leader were here.

The other younger disciples nodded. Ouyang Zizhen added in, "Yeah, they talk as if they know Senior Wei so well but it's obvious they don't! You'd be stupid to believe in just these common hearsays."

The older cultivators who heard this sweatdropped.

Another person jumped into the conversation, "You know, if Jiang Cheng never planned to aim at Wei Wuxian's weaknesses, who knows if the siege would've been successful or not. Should I remind you folks of the item that Wei Wuxian possesses? The Stygian Tiger Amulet that completely annihilated three thousand skilled cultivators in a single night?"

"I heard that it was more than three thousand. Maybe five thousand?"

The gossipers threw more exaggerated ideas, causing the cultivators in the cave who had shouted at Wei Wuxian during the second siege feel a bit ashamed. They might have been a bit too gullible in believing the rumors so easily. But how could one know what was real or not when it came to the Yiling Patriarch?

"It's a good thing that he destroyed that evil weapon before he died. Otherwise, if it was left in this world to harm humankind, his sins would have been greater." As he spoke, the scene showed a great explosion of the Stygian Tiger Amulet getting destroyed, leaving a mushroom cloud in the sky.

Too bad someone like Xue Yang existed who had the talent to recreate his work just by reading his notes, Wei Wuxian bitterly thought.

"Did you know back then, Wei Wuxian was one of the most promising cultivators in his generation, coming from a highly distinguished sect and finding success at a young age. How on earth did he end up where he is now?"

"Using these dishonest practices would only seem beneficial at first glance but hey, look at where it got him. Not even an entire corpse was left behind."

Wei Wuxian shivered. He was glad no corpse was left behind of him since Lan Zhan had gone back to the Burial Mounds to search for any sign of him. He'd rather be remembered for his past self's beautiful appearance, thank you very much!

Someone continued to say, "Not everything was because of his cultivation path. Wei Wuxian's personality was quite immoral too. One's deeds will be paid, one way or another; what goes around always comes around."

A woman then cut in, "Oh yeah… doesn't Wei Wuxian have the ability to seize another's body? What if… his soul returns and possesses someone to revive himself?"

Wei Wuxian snorted. These people really expected the worst from him. He shouldn't be surprised by now.

"That's impossible! One hundred and twenty stone beasts were placed around the top of Burial Mound. All of the various clans had initiated numerous soul-summoning rituals and none of them have found his soul."

Now that was a surprise for him. His soul couldn't be found? More like somebody had probably locked his soul away and kept him hidden until the time was right to release him back into the world.

Wei Wuxian whispered to his lover, "Do you think my soul being missing was from you-know-who's actions?"

Lan Zhan threw a side-glance at the Qinghe Nie sect and nodded shortly.

Humming, Wei Wuxian turned back to the screen and continued watching.

"It's already been thirteen years. It looks like that Yiling Patriarch had really perished!"

"I don't suppose that there'd be anyone else in this world who can revive the Yiling Patriarch, would there?"

"Aside from himself, who else would be that capable?"

Nearly everyone in the cave internally sighed, knowing that a certain son of Jin Guangshao had done it.

The gossipers laughed and drank some more but their voices eventually faded away until the scene turned black again.

Wei Wuxian liked to believe that none of their words had affected him but just like in his previous life, he felt anger and resentment rise in him at having his whole character painted black by these people who knew nothing about him. He was only human, after all. But Wei Wuxian managed to curb it since he had somebody beside him who would always stand by his side no matter what.

"Lan Zhan, you know I'm nothing like what they said, right?" Wei Wuxian asked anyway, feeling a need to hear a verbal confirmation from his husband.

Lan Wangji nodded without hesitation, “Wei Ying is a good person. Always has and always will be.”

Hearing such words of faith fall from Hanguang-Jun’s lips, Wei Wuxian grinned happily and couldn’t resist the urge to hug Lan Zhan and kiss him on the cheek. Lan Wangji didn’t reprimand him for his excessive show of affection around others, and instead turned it up a notch by pecking him on the lips. Wei Wuxian was delighted but he held back for the sake of the younger disciples (and Jiang Cheng’s virgin eyes). To others, it seemed that Lan Wangji cared more about Wei Wuxian than his own reputation.

The cultivators who hadn’t heard their exchange were a bit impressed by Wei Wuxian’s ability to continue smiling after that. They wouldn’t have been able to handle it if they’d been barraged with insults directed at them so shamelessly in front of a crowd. Although they’d once believed in the evilness of the Yiling Patriarch, they couldn’t help but feel that there seemed to be something more to it than just what they’ve seen and heard in the surface.

Of course, those who held deep grudges against the Yiling Patriarch all secretly agreed with the words of those voices. No matter what, they wouldn’t be able to let go of the bad blood they had for him due to the fact that he had destroyed either their own or their family’s lives.

As everyone rumminated on what they’ve just seen, the screen once more presented a new image, revealing a person sitting in a bloody array with ominous music echoing in the background.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter, their reaction to:

- Mo Xuanyu’s Sacrifice

If you guys have certain scenes you don’t want me skipping over or are excited to see reacted to, you can comment about it down below~ ^^

Reincarnation

Chapter Notes

> i initially wanted to write more scenes but then that would take a longer time to post so here's chapter 2! :D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The man displayed on screen was none other than Mo Xuanyu, the illegitimate son of Jin Guangshao, who unexpectedly did what every cultivator feared the most.

Reincarnating the Yiling Patriarch.

“Everyday is unendurable… death would be preferable to life.”

“My mother was born from a servant of the Mo Clan….she gave me birth to me when she was sixteen.”

“... due to poor aptitude and other worldly matters, I was sent back home.”

“Since then, mother and I have been humiliated by the entire Mo clan…”

“...unable to withstand the disgrace, mother passed away.”

“I, Xuanyu, am left with nobody by my side.”

Wei Wuxian leaned in, eyes wide as he stared at the man who originally occupied the body he now owned. Although he was grateful to be back, he felt that it was a great pity that someone as young as Mo Xuanyu had decided to exchange his life for revenge. Who knew what life he would’ve had if he’d never summoned Wei Wuxian’s spirit?

But Wei Wuxian understood why he did it though, probably more than Mo Xuanyu had thought when he summoned what he believed to be an evil and vengeful ghost. It was ironic that the person who would call him back to life was another poor soul targeted by the ridicule and hatred from society just because of his birth, of his personality, of not being the person others expected him to be. Coupled with losing the only person by his side, Wei Wuxian wasn’t at all surprised by Mo Xuanyu’s desperate decision.

But it was still regretful. Wei Wuxian bowed his head and sent a silent prayer to the soul that had returned to the soil, hoping Mo Xuanyu would reincarnate to a better life and find happiness elsewhere.

Lan Wangji shifted his eyes towards Wei Wuxian, noticing his solemn demeanor. He closed his eyes and sent a silent prayer of his own. He would be forever grateful to have Wei Ying

by his side again, no matter the reason it was orchestrated for, but to have him at the cost of someone's life was never right.

Jin Ling felt a little awkward seeing his lunatic of an uncle calling upon the spirits and offering his body as sacrifice, knowing that he was forever gone and his body was now occupied by Wei Wuxian. He didn't have much love for this young uncle of his in the first place, remembering how troublesome he was while training in Carp Tower, but for some reason, there was still a trace of guilt within him. Maybe there existed a tiny part of him that kind of wished he'd gotten to know this uncle of his more.

On screen, Mo Xuanyu had collapsed to the ground. Eventually, he woke up, looking confused and disoriented.

'Where… where am I?'

Wei Wuxian scrunched his brows. This was the moment he took over and came back from the dead after so many years. However, something felt wrong.

Before, Mo Xuanyu (or Wei Wuxian now) could gather his bearings, the sound of footsteps was heard and a big, young man entered the little cottage.

"Mo Xuanyu!"

"Eh? You… you are?"

The young man looked offended that Mo Xuanyu was "pretending" not to know him. He proceeded to hurl insults and order his servants to trash the place, looking for something Wei Wuxian didn't know. As Mo Xuanyu was kicked by the man, Wei Wuxian thought, 'that's quite a lot of courage you have to kick me, the Yiling Patriarch!'

Wei Wuxian jolted. He turned to Lan Wangji, whispering, "Lan Zhan, those are my thoughts. How is this thing picking up my thoughts?"

Lan Wangji's brows furrowed slightly. He didn't know either.

"Whose land do you think you're living on? Whose rice are you eating? Whose money are you spending? What's wrong with taking a few of your belongings? Everything you own should be mine, anyways!"

An old cultivator couldn't help exclaiming, "I say, who is that self-absorbed brat?"

"Some young master of the Mo family." Lan Jingyi responded with a scoff, looking annoyed at the person on screen.

"He's Mo Ziyuan. I believe he was the cousin of Mo Xuanyu." Lan Sizhui helpfully provided.

"Spoiled boys like this are the result of bad parenting." A woman dressed in Meishan Yu sect robes sneered.

“I heard the entire Mo family clan was killed by an evil spirit. But it turns out the Yiling Patriarch arrived before their deaths …” A hooked nose cultivator spoke, his tone insinuating things that everyone easily picked up on.

Wei Wuxian smirked derisively at him, “Why don’t we keep watching and find out?”

The young master, Mo Ziyuan, poked Wei WuXian forcefully on the nose, “You dared to tell on me, and look at you now, playing dead on the ground!" As he spat more undignified words to his cousin, Wei Wuxian's thoughts overlapped them.

'I’m not pretending to be dead at all, since I’ve actually been dead for a couple of years.'

'Who is this?'

'When did I do something as immoral as stealing another’s body?'

Wei Wuxian paled. His thoughts were clearly being publicized for everyone to hear!

"Ah! Ah! How can it know what I'm thinking?!" He exclaimed, hands messing up his hair.

Lan Xichen said, "It seems like this is some sort of… all-knowing device that can illustrate Wuxian’s perspective since the time of his rebirth. But it escapes me how anyone can cast an enchantment so powerful?"

"If this anonymous cultivator could trap all of us in here and take away our spiritual powers too, then this is clearly someone with enough power to do the impossible," Lan Qiren stated, his narrowed eyes displaying his annoyance at their current situation.

"But why display my thoughts too?! Now everything is out in the open!" Wei Wuxian dramatically groaned, acting weak-kneed so he could lean against Hanguang-Jun. His husband naturally extended an arm for him.

"So what if we hear your thoughts? You say everything you think anyway." Jiang Cheng said with a huff.

Wei Wuxian straightened up and pointed at his martial brother, "You try having your head peeped into, Jiang Cheng, and see if you like it!"

"You--!"

"Wei Ying," Lan Wangji drew Wei Wuxian's attention back to himself, "It'll be alright."

His husband sighed and leaned against him once more, "Actually, I'm not that concerned about people hearing my thoughts on events like now but w-when the story starts involving you, Lan Zhan, my thoughts may get a little… shameless." Wei Wuxian whispered, coughing a bit at the end. He was suddenly reminded of the shameless things he'd done to Lan Zhan when he thought the other didn't know of his identity yet and he could feel himself sinking into a pit of embarrassment.

Meanwhile, Lan Wangji was having an internal battle with himself. On one hand, hearing Wei Wuxian's thoughts about him when he came back didn't sound so bad, but on the other, did he want dozens of people listening in? No, definitely not.

"We'll think of a way," He said, a bit helpless to alleviate Wei Wuxian's worries.

Everyone continued to watch as Wei Wuxian, now in Mo Xuanyu's body, began to inspect his surroundings and himself. Hearing how Wei Wuxian found the makeup on his face weird, it got the juniors chuckling in nostalgia.

"Why did Mo Xuanyu put makeup on like that anyway? He looked like a hanged ghost when we first met Senior Wei in that body." Lan Jingyi snorted.

Lan Sizhui shook his head, "Maybe he's just not that proficient at it? We'll never know."

As the image zoomed in on the bloody array Wei Wuxian was sitting on, several cultivators' faces darkened.

"That's a very dark array if I'd ever seen one."

"How in the world did someone like Mo Xuanyu get his hands on a curse like this?"

"Could it be that Jin Guangyao was hiding these kind of vile techniques in Carp Tower and Mo Xuanyu happened to stumble upon them?"

"That's it! No wonder he got kicked out! You all heard the reason Jin Guangyao made when Mo Xuanyu was kicked out of Carp Tower but I'm beginning to suspect there was something more to it." Sect Leader Yao added to the conversation excitedly, stroking his beard. Several cultivators nodded, eyes alight with this new piece of information.

Meanwhile, Wei Wuxian side glanced Nie Huaisang and noticed the other looked a bit pale. If this thing was going to keep narrating the events from his rebirth until now, especially with his thoughts running commentary, then Nie Huaisang was going to be facing a lot of scrutiny when certain things come to light.

After learning what Mo Xuanyu had done, Wei Wuxian muttered, “How can this be? Aside from my unfortunate death situation… if you searched all of heaven and earth, you wouldn’t find a more peace-loving and dutiful spirit than me. How have I become a sinister ghoul?”

Jiang Cheng couldn’t help but snort while Lan Xichen coughed into his fist, looking aside. Lan Qiren’s expression screamed that he had other thoughts than ‘peace-loving and dutiful’ to describe Wei Wuxian.

“Hey, what’s so funny? It’s the truth!” Wei Wuxian crossed his arms with a pout.

“Yes, Wuxian,” Lan Xichen replied, smiling, “You’re definitely no sinister ghoul.”

Meanwhile, the sect leaders and their disciples exchanged glances, thinking otherwise.

Wei Wuxian continued, "Following the rules of Body Offering… once I have taken over the body of the caster, if I don't grant his wish for revenge, then my spirit will be completely annihilated, never to be born again!" He raised his hands to find that both of his wrists were crisscrossed with multiple cuts. He proceeded to take off his belt. Under the black clothes, his chest and stomach were also covered with what seemed to be lacerations from a sharp tool.

He thought, 'If I don't fulfill it, the wounds will not be able to heal. It'll worsen as time went on, and if the time limit was passed, both my soul and this body would be ripped apart.'

"Absurd. Truly absurd!" Wei Wuxian hit the ground, looking comically lost and distressed while the music playing in the background kept the feelings light and playful. It felt like the situation wasn't so bleak despite Wei Wuxian's current situation.

Wei Wuxian sighed and patted his no longer scarred chest, "Ah, I'm so glad that was dealt with easily."

Lan Wangji glanced down at his clothed form, eyes narrowed in concern. He wrapped a hand around Wei Wuxian's waist and his fingers rubbed lightly against him as though he could feel the scars that had once threatened Wei Wuxian's life but were no longer there.

Wei Wuxian immediately settled into it, cozying up to Lan Zhan's side and telling him, "It's okay now, Lan Zhan. I'm fine. I'll be here with you, now and forever."

"Forever." Lan Zhan repeated. His eyes shone with delight at that and his fingers briefly squeezed his husband's waist before loosening.

"Though I do think I might have to thank someone for it. Did he plan this far ahead? Even Mo Xuanyu's revenge? I doubt it was all just a happy coincidence, hitting two birds with one stone-- achieving Mo Xuanyu's wish while at the same time, getting me close to that hand." Wei Wuxian shook his head, amazed by the shrewd man's foresight.

"Mn."

"But wait… what was Mo Xuanyu's wish… again?" Wei Wuxian's face went blank as he stared down at the writings left behind by Mo Xuanyu. "There's nothing… he didn't say anything…"

Wei Wuxian began to curse, "Where did this brat get an incomplete copy?! He missed the step of reading his wish!"

"Senior Wei, you managed to fulfill his wish, right? You're fine now?" Sizhui couldn't help but ask even though Wei Wuxian looked healthy and happy now.

The Yiling Patriarch patted Sizhui's head, giving him a doting smile, "You have nothing to worry about, A-Yuan. Actually, you guys helped out a lot in saving me!" He gestured towards the other junior disciples and they looked at him in confusion.

Wei Wuxian started to think, “Since I have to pursue revenge, does that mean confiscating property or exterminating the family? Judging from the brat’s way of things, it’s probably to wipe out the entire clan.”

“Looks like it’s probably that. After all, I’m the legendary immoral, ungrateful villain who’s out of his mind and doesn’t care about anyone, not even his family and friends. Is there anyone more sinister than me?” He sighed dejectedly, slumping down on the bed, “Yeah, but… you’ve got the wrong person.”

"You dare to refute it now, Yiling Patriarch? How wretched of you to slaughter an entire family to keep yourself alive." The same hooked nose cultivator sneered.

"Listen, I didn't ask to be brought back," Wei Wuxian defended even though he didn't have to. He knew he was innocent, “But since I'm here, I don’t think I’d give up the chance to live once more."

The man scoffed, "You could have just done us all a favor and let yourself perish once and for all if you think you’re so righteous." The man muttered, though cultivators' heightened sense of hearing allowed them to all hear it.

Suddenly, Lan Wangji's deep voice cut through the tension, "Judging someone before acquiring evidence or seeing the act done themselves is simply placing one's biased perception over another." Then he turned towards the juniors of his clan, "Gusu Lan disciples should always perform in a just and open-minded behavior."

"Yes, Hanguang-Jun." Sizhui hurriedly bowed, followed by Jingyi and the rest.

The hooked nose cultivator grew red in the face, unable to say anything in front of someone as highly respected as Hanguang-Jun. He hid in the crowd of his sect, ashamed and silenced.

Wei Wuxian grinned giddily. His husband was so clever, acting as if he were lecturing his disciples but was really pointedly telling off that cultivator for him.

Lan Zhan was the best!

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter, their reaction to:

- Mo Family and Gusu Lan Disciples

Aggression I

Chapter Notes

thank you so much for all of your lovely comments!! i was floored with the responses last chapter and I'm really glad that so many of you are enjoying this fic so far ＼(*T▽T*)／

Some have asked me if I have an updating schedule so I've decided every Sunday (China time) is when I'll update. But if I already have the chapter edited and I feel like updating it sooner, I'll update on a Saturday night (´∀`) b

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next moving image on screen showed the sun shining brightly in the sky before it panned to land on the small hut Mo Xuanyu lived. It seemed to indicate that a day had passed. In the next moment, it showed Wei Wuxian inside the hut, sitting in a lotus position. All of a sudden, there was the sound of growling coming from his stomach and he collapsed to the floor.

His thoughts rang out loudly for everyone to hear, 'Don't tell me that I'll be the first sinister ghoul in all of history… to have just been reincarnated… before starving to death…'

Jin Ling and Lan Jingyi couldn't help but ' *pffft'* into their hands. Wei Wuxian's expression in that moment was just too funny.

Jiang Cheng's sideways glance at them though, made the two juniors cough and look away.

He muttered bitterly to himself, "This body's level of cultivation isn't even enough for him to have practiced inedia yet."

Wei Wuxian sighed, stroking his middle, "And until now, I still can't." He pouted.

Hearing this, Lan Wangji ran a hand down his husband's back, comforting him, "Soon. Do not worry."

Hauling himself up, Wei WuXian lifted his foot and was about to kick the door open, when the sound of approaching footsteps appeared. Someone stomped on the door and grunted, "It's mealtime!" Wei Wuxian was surprised to find a small bowl set being shoved into a miniature opening at the bottom of the door.

A-Tong, Mo Ziyuan's servant, shouted from outside, "Chop-chop! What are you waiting for? Take the bowl out after you finish!"

Lan Jingyi sneered, "What is he? A dog? I can't believe they'd treat a relative like that."

Ouyang Zizhen shook his head, ”Even the servants don’t treat him well.”

Suddenly a girl’s voice appeared alongside A-Tong’s. They began chatting about the walking corpses that had recently been tormenting their village.

‘Walking corpses?’ Wei Wuxian perked his head up, ‘Seems like that Mo Village hasn’t been too peaceful.’ He tilted his head to the side, sighing, ‘Now that they mention walking corpses, it really brings me back to the good old days!’

Jin Ling turned to Wei Wuxian with a bewildered expression, “You call the days controlling the working corpses as good?”

Wei Wuxian smiled, eyes briefly flicking to Sizhui and Wen Ning before back to his nephew, “There was a time when it wasn’t so bad.”

Jiang Cheng made a small ‘hmph’ sound, eyes staring straight at the screen.

They continued to talk about cultivators from a prominent clan arriving in Mo Village to help out with the problem. “The Madam is talking to them in the Main Hall, and everyone in town is watching. I don’t have time to play around with you. They might give me more work afterwards.”

After pondering for a moment, Wei Wuxian stood up and kicked the door. It cracked with a loud clank. The two servants screamed when the door suddenly flung open. Wei WuXian threw away his bowl and walked outside, flinching from the glare of the sun.

A-Tong took a closer look and realized it was Mo XuanYu. He jumped over and waved his hands like he was reproaching a dog, “It’s just the lunatic. Shoo! Shoo! Go away! Why did you come out?”

“Am I some sort of animal to these people? Seriously, such bad manners.” Wei Wuxian clicked his tongue, shaking his head.

“I’m surprised you didn’t do anything about it.” Jiang Cheng blandly commented.

All of a sudden, Wei Wuxian kicked the man on the chest and pinned him to the ground with his foot, “Who do you think you’re talking to?”

Wei Wuxian winked at his martial brother, “Spoke too soon, Jiang Cheng.”

“I would have done something more than just kick him. I would have put him in his place.” Jin Ling huffed with a straightened his spine.

“What? Like stab him with your sword?” Jingyi jibed.

Realizing what he meant, Jin Ling angrily spun to him, “You--!”

“Okay, okay. Let’s calm down, Young Master Jin. Jingyi, stop provoking him.” Sizhui mediated between them.

Wei Wuxian smirked then walked away from the two scared servants. He arrived at the Main Hall where a crowd of people stood watching something. He cut through them just in time to hear a woman's voice speak, "A member from the younger generations of our family… used to be a cultivator as well."

Wei WuXian didn't wait for her to finish speaking before he quickly hustled through the crowd, grinning, "I'm coming, I'm coming. Right here!" As he pushed himself to the front, he pointed to his face, "Who was calling me earlier? Someone who used to be a cultivator, isn't that me?"

Everyone in the Main Hall looked surprised by his appearance. Because there was too much powder on Wei Wuxian's face, the powder sprinkled off as he smiled. Lan Jingyi was on the brink of laughter and ended up letting out a 'pfft' sound. His face grew serious again as Lan Sizhui gave him a disapproving look.

"Hey, it's us!" Lan Jingyi pointed, nudging Lan Sizhui.

"Why are you so excited?" Sizhui smiled.

"Uhm… Not sure. Don't you feel excited seeing a moving image of yourself?"

Sizhui glanced back at the screen and nodded. It was a bit surreal to be honest, watching an event that had happened before but from a different perspective. It made him notice the little things he'd missed before.

Ouyang Zizhen sighed dreamily, "I can't wait for when I show up."

"Ha! I'm going to appear sooner." Jin Ling smugly said.

Before Ouyang could say anything, Jingyi scoffed, "It's not a competition!"

"I wasn't saying it is!"

Wei Wuxian looked at this group of excitedly chattering children and shook his head, "Look at them. It's like they'd forgotten why were here in the first place." But there was a smile on his face. Lan Wangji hummed under his breath, his eyes back on the screen to watch the moments he'd missed of Wei Wuxian's rebirth.

Wei Wuxian thought to himself as he looked at the juniors in the Main Hall, 'I didn't realize it would be disciples from the Gusu Lan Sect. Their outfits really look like mourning clothes. And those bands around their foreheads… The Lan sect truly wear some extremely pointless stuff.'

Several juniors, not of the Gusu Lan sect, tried their best not to laugh but a smattering of snickers could still be heard. A few of them even came from the older cultivators who had thought of the same but never dared to voice them. Who knew this Yiling Patriarch could be funny?

Wei Wuxian sweatdropped, carefully avoiding Lan Qiren's eyes. 'Damn inner thoughts! How could you expose me like this?!'

One of the Gusu Lan sect disciples, who was particularly proud of their clan's outfits, squacked, "Mourning clothes!? These-- these are the most elegant and beautiful robes with the most intricate designs you'll ever see! Not to mention--!"

"Yes, yes. I'm sorry," Wei Wuxian immediately said, "I was still very much clueless at this point."

"Don't apologize for your thoughts, Wuxian. We know it is not your intention to have those heard," Lan Xichen said. Lan Qiren just angrily glared in the distance.

"... you… you said it, Sect Leader Lan! Don't take it back now." Wei Wuxian pointed at him before crossing his arms over his chest.

Lady Mo demanded her husband to get him out of there. But Wei WuXian suddenly dropped to the ground, his limbs tightly clinging to the floor. Nobody could get him up, even after more servants were called to help. Her husband scolded him, "... You damn madman! If you don't go back now, wait and see how I'll punish you!"

When the crowd began to whisper amongst themselves, Wei Wuxian spoke, "You want me to go back? Sure." Then he pointed at Mo ZiYuan, "But tell him to return the things he stole from me first."

Mo Ziyuan was furious and raised his foot to kick Wei Wuxian. But then the screen suddenly showed Sizhui moving his finger slightly, causing Mo Ziyuan's foot to slip and fall to the ground. His foot only scraped Wei Wuxian but he still rolled on the ground, as if he was really kicked, and pulled open the front of his robe, showing the footprint from yesterday.

"Eh? You actually did that, Sizhui?" Lan Jingyi was shocked.

Before Lan Sizhui could respond, he suddenly found himself engulfed in an embrace. Wei Wuxian exclaimed with a huge grin, "I didn't realize that was you! I thought the fool just fell on himself." He laughed and squeezed the teenager tighter, "That's my A-Yuan! Always protecting the poor and helpless."

Sizhui's smile was bigger than usual as he hugged Wei Wuxian back, "Hanguang-Jun always taught me to prevent violence from happening. I'm happy to help Senior Wei whenever he needs it."

Wei Wuxian sniffled when he heard that, turning to Lan Wangji this time. "You raised him so well, Lan Zhan." He then proceeded to fling himself at Hanguang-Jun who caught him like it was as natural as breathing. He didn't move a single step and promptly wrapped his arms around his husband who just wanted an excuse to snuggle up to him.

Madam Mo cleared her throat, "Stealing? Robbing? How disrespectful. We're all part of one family. He only borrowed them because he wanted to take a look. A-Yuan is your younger brother. As the older one, you shouldn't be reluctant to lend one or two playthings. It's only a trivial matter, yet you're throwing a child's tantrum, making a fool of yourself. It's not as if he won't return them."

A woman from the Meishan Yu clan exclaimed, “What a disgusting tactic to defend her spoiled child. If I had a son like that, I’d make sure to whip him into shape.”

When Wei Wuxian heard that, he shivered. Even Jiang Cheng swallowed a little. Clearly, the clan Madam Yu came from held the same terrifying principles of tough love.

Wei Wuxian continued to pester Madam Mo and Mo Ziyuan for his things, saying shameless things one after the other. He even said, “I wouldn’t care as much if you were only losing your own face. Good thing that I’m your cousin. If I were a young maiden, you would’ve destroyed my reputation! I still want to find a good man!”

Jiang Cheng rolled his eyes, “There he goes. The family was doomed from the start when they tried to argue with someone as shameless as him.”

Lan Jingyi could no longer hold in his laughter and spat out the tea he just drank. Lan Sizhui was surprised beside him but then sighed hopelessly.

“Jingyi,” Hanguang-Jun’s deep voice was heard.

The junior, who was snickering again at seeing Wei Wuxian’s performance a second time, immediately shut his mouth and bowed to Lan Wangji, “I apologize for my lack of decorum in public, Hanguang-Jun.”

“Ey, it’s not his fault. He can’t help but laugh at the amazing me,” Wei Wuxian chuckled.

Jin Ling shook his head in wonder, “You are really too shameless in public. How could you just act like that without getting embarrassed?”

“It’s my innate talent.” He grinned and winked.

“More like a curse to anyone who has to put up with your annoying ass. I still wonder to this day how Hanguang-Jun can handle you.” Jiang Cheng huffed, his tone not as harsh as before, though only someone who has known him for long like Wei Wuxian would notice.

Wei Wuxian opened his mouth to retaliate but Lan Zhan beat him to it, “Keep wondering.”

Everyone in the vicinity who heard him paused in shock as they turned to stare at the always upright and aloof Hanguang-Jun, who rarely talked back to people. Meanwhile, Wei Wuxian doubled over in laughter, clinging to Lan Wangji as if he just said the funniest joke in the world. His husband kept an unwavering stance but his golden eyes were gazing down fondly at a single person only.

Finally incensed, Mo Ziyuan screamed and tried to beat Wei Wuxian with a chair. The crowd of villagers fled away while Wei Wuxian dodged and bolted towards the group of boys from the Lan sect who were all gaping at the scene. Lan Sizhui tried to appease Mo Ziyuan to stop attacking while Madam Mo helplessly explained Mo Xuanyu’s ‘condition’. Wei Wuxian defended himself by shouting, “Who said that my words shouldn’t be taken seriously?! Next time, try stealing my things again, and I’ll cut off one of your hands.” He threatened, smiling darkly at Mo Ziyuan. He then leapt outside quickly.

“Ah, I shouldn’t have said that.” Wei Wuxian lamented, smiling bitterly.

When Mo Ziyuan tried to chase after him, Lan Sizhui blocked him and switched to the main topic at hand with a serious tone. He reminded them of the rules to stay inside and Madam Mo hastily agreed. Mo Ziyuan was still bristling with anger and he thought as he was dragged away by his mother, ‘this lunatic is going down tonight!’

“Oh, hey! We can hear his thoughts!” Wei Wuxian pointed out, then he grinned as he turned to Lan Wangji, “Maybe I’m not the only one who gets their inner thoughts exposed after all!”

Suddenly, everyone who had their stories tied to Wei Wuxian deeply prayed that this wouldn’t be the case.

Wei WuXian walked out the door of the Mo family’s place, and showed his face around the village. Although he surprised countless people, he looked delighted doing it. He fixed his hair and looked at his wrists. ‘So it seems that a light revenge of taking Mo Xuanyu’s anger out on Mo Ziyuan isn’t nearly enough… ‘

‘Don’t tell me that I’ll really have to eliminate the entire Mo Clan? To be honest, it wouldn’t be too difficult of a task.’

“Oh, so that’s why you antagonized Mo Ziyuan that much. You were checking to see if it fulfilled one of Mo Xuanyu’s wishes?” Sizhui said, a look of revelation on his face.

Wei Wuxian nodded with a smile, “Of course! I’m not so heartless that I’d slaughter an entire clan right away if I had other choices. Although, they had bad karma coming for them to begin with.” He purposely made his voice louder to make sure that hooked nose man heard him.

Wei Wuxian suddenly saw flags being raised in the West Courtyard. Curious, he jumped atop a roof and surveyed the juniors below. He thought, ‘Why did the fluttering black flags on top of the roofs and walls look so familiar?’

He suddenly realized as he muttered to himself, “Although the entire cultivation world seems to hate me to the bones, they’re still using the things I came up with, aren’t they?”

Wei Wuxian nodded to his past self.

A cultivator whispered to another, “Those were made by Wei Wuxian?”

“You didn’t know? He invented a lot of things.”

“Oh. Then why does sect leader allow us to use them if we’re supposed to despise Yiling Patriarch and his practices so much?”

The cultivator he was talking to made an uncomfortable expression and shrugged, “I don’t know. Don’t ask me.”

Their conversation didn’t go unheard to certain sect leaders. They could only grit their teeth as they didn’t want to admit that the inventions made by Wei Wuxian were certainly helpful

for night-hunting.

Lan Jingyi, who was standing on the roof, saw him and nicely asked him to leave. But instead of obeying his words, Wei Wuxian jumped down and swiped one of the flag from its poles. Jingyi looked startled and tried to stop him. But Wei Wuxian was in full lunatic-mode and didn't want to give it back.

"Oh no." Lan Jingyi murmured, starting to remember what he did here.

He caught up to Wei Wuxian in a few strides and grabbed his arm, "If you're not going to give it back, I am going to hit you!"

"Nuh-uh! I want it!"

Sizhui ran in to hold Jingyi back, "Jingyi, calm down. Just take the flag back. What is the use of making such a fuss?"

"Sizhui, I didn't actually hit him! Look at him. He messed up the whole flag formation!"

"Tsk tsk. Threatening to hit a senior. That deserves punishment, right?" Wei Wuxian teased, giving Lan Wangji a glance.

Lan Jingyi looked close to begging Wei Wuxian not to say any more. He already felt like he would be bowing and apologizing a lot throughout this entire viewing.

As they talked, Wei Wuxian was already inspecting the flag in his hand, 'The motifs are drawn correctly and the incantations are complete. There aren't any errors, so nothing should go wrong when it's used. It's just that the person who drew the flags is lacking in experience. The incantations would at most be able to attract corpses and other beings from within one and a half miles away. Well… they should be enough, anyways. There shouldn't be any malicious creatures in a place as small as the Mo Village.'

The Gusu Lan sect disciples who'd been there at Mo Village sighed at this line full of foreshadowing. They hadn't been ready at all for what happened later that night.

Sizhui approached Mo Xuanyu and held out his hand for the flag, "Young Master Mo, the sky is growing dark and we will start capturing the walking corpses soon. It will be dangerous at night, so it would be best for you to return to your room."

Wei Wuxian sighed, slinging an arm around Sizhui and cuddling him to his side, "My sweet A-Yuan who had been raised by the great Hanguang-Jun, truly a good and proper man through and through. See Jingyi, this is how you ask for things nicely!"

"I-You-?" Jingyi sputtered, feeling wronged. Meanwhile, Jin Ling snickered at the side.

Lan SiZhui spoke again, "This flag…" Before he finished, Wei WuXian threw the Phantom Attraction Flag onto the ground and humphed, "It's just a flag, what's the big deal? I can draw way better than this!"

He sprinted off the moment he threw the flag away. The boys who stood on the roof to watch the bustle almost fell off from the laughter. "What a lunatic!" Lan Jingyi cursed at his back.

The other junior cultivators muttered to each other, "He really is insane."

"Does he feel no shame?"

"Ignorance is bliss, I guess."

The Gusu Lan sect disciples along with Jingyi bowed in apology to Wei Wuxian.

"None of that now. I was just joking earlier." Wei Wuxian waved his hand, ushering them to stand up properly again, "Hanguang-Jun won't deliver punishments just because my acting skills were so good, right?"

Lan Wangji briefly swept his eyes over them, "Still broke one of the rules. Do not speak ill of others or gossip about them behind their backs."

"Oh." Wei Wuxian glanced at them and shrugged as if to say, 'you're on your own now.'

The disciples wilted and earnestly prayed that that was the last of their moments on screen. Who knew if Hanguang-Jun was keeping count of their punishments?!

Sizhui turned back to them, "Mind your words. It's best if you come back here and help." He sighed then looked in the direction where Mo Xuanyu had disappeared to. He continued giving his orders, "The rest of you can go back to your positions." He pointed to another disciple, "You can go over there and put the flag back."

"Yes!"

Wei Wuxian smiled when heard that junior, 'The flag formation is set in an organized manner and his mannerisms are also respectful. The boy leading the group is especially exceptional in terms of potential. He's fair and refined, with a dignified appearance and a faint smile. I approve of him. The Gusu Lan Sect is so full of over-conservative people. Just which cultivator brought up such a junior?'

"Of course, it's none other than Lan Zhan!" Wei Wuxian clung to Lan Wangji's arm and grinned up at the beautiful man. He shook his head at the screen, "Ah, past self, how did you not think of that in the first place? Although, maybe I would have thought of your brother too."

"Sizhui learned a bit from brother too when I was still recuperating." Lan Wangji explained. Wei Wuxian frowned every time he thought of the reason why Lan Zhan had to stay in bed for three years, but he was glad that he had A-Yuan to keep his days occupied and happy.

Lan Sizhui blushed as he heard Senior Wei's first impressions of him. It made him happy that he managed to gain the approval of Wei Wuxian even without knowing who he was and how much he meant to him yet.

Wen Ning glanced down at A-Yuan, looking like he was trying to smile but couldn't. He just settled on patting his head. Hanguang-Jun really did a good job of raising him, even though he had no blood relation to A-Yuan.

Love was a powerful thing.

"Oh well… the new ones will always surpass the old, won't they? It's time to go back~" Wei Wuxian stretched, heading back to Mo Xuanyu's little hut. He ignored the broken bolt and the mess on the ground, picked a relatively clean spot, and sat in a lotus position again.

Chapter End Notes

why is jingyi my spirit animal for when i need reactions HAHA

Next chapter:

- The appearance of the cursed hand

Aggression II-III

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The screen faded to black before it opened to a scene of servants quickly approaching Mo Xuanyu's hut with torches. They furiously shouted, "Just barge inside and drag him out!"

"Notify the officials!"

"What do you mean 'notify the officials'?! Beat him to death!"

Lan Wangji pursed his lips, arm raised to wind around Wei Wuxian's waist.

Wei Wuxian was shown sleeping inside. He woke up from the commotion and wondered if there had been a mistake with the boy's flag formation. He let the servants bodily drag him away to the East Courtyard. All of the servants and relatives were present, looking terrified while the Gusu Lan disciples were bent around a corpse wrapped in a blanket on the ground.

It was Mo Ziyuan.

The juniors of other clans gasped and cringed at the sight of the body.

"Weh, what's with that attitude? You've seen hundreds of these things already in Burial Mounds." Wei Wuxian said, noticing their reaction.

"B-But Senior Wei, they didn't look this ugly and scary as if their blood and flesh had been sucked out of them." A youngster said, shivering.

"Yeah and I was more concerned about surviving than looking at them closely." Another said, rubbing the back of his head when his fellow disciples laughed in agreement.

Wei Wuxian smirked, "Well, you better get used to it. I've faced scarier things that you'll soon see!"

The juniors paled at the thought.

Wei Wuxian heard the juniors discussing about the body being discovered thirty minutes ago in the hallway after they had finished suppressing the walking corpses. As Wei WuXian was scrutinizing the corpse, Madam Mo suddenly rushed towards him with a gleaming dagger in her hand. Sizhui warned, "Careful!" and quickly knocked the dagger away.

Wei Wuxian backed away and patted his chest in relief, "Whew. Close call, close call…"

Lan Sizhui turned to Wei Wuxian, "Did you really not notice her coming?"

Wei Wuxian grinned, "Of course I did! I would have dodged but A-Yuan stepped in and saved me." He then brushed a fake tear away, sniffing, "Such a brave spirit. You definitely

take that from me, right Lan Zhan?"

"Mm."

Lan Sizhui just smiled in amusement.

Madam Mo shrieked, "My child died such a tragic death. I have to avenge him! Why are you standing in my way!"

Wei WuXian hid behind Lan Sizhui's back again, and spoke while squatting, "How does your son's tragic death have anything to do with me?"

Sizhui tried to calm her, "Madam Mo, seeing your son's condition, his flesh and essence have been drawn out of him, which means that he was killed by an evil being, not him."

Lan Sizhui winced at his wording of the spirit's description since he now knew the hand belonged to the renowned Chifeng-Zun. Although, his severed hand did resemble that of an evil spirit.

Madam Mo's chest heaved, "You know nothing! The lunatic's father was a cultivator. He must have learned a lot of demonic spells from him!"

Sizhui thought that Wei Wuxian looked a bit dull-witted and said, "Uh, Madam, there is indeed a lack of evidence. I suggest that…"

Jin Ling and Lan Jingyi fought hard not to laugh after hearing Sizhui's thoughts for the first time.

Wei Wuxian side-eyed the junior, "Did you just look at me and think I was dumb, Sizhui?"

"S-Senior Wei, that's not— I didn't expect— !"

Wei Wuxian burst out laughing, patting Lan Sizhui hard on the back, "My acting is so good huh? I could really become an actor now. What do you think, Lan Zhan?"

Lan Wangji gave him a once over and said, "If it's what Wei Ying wants."

Meanwhile on the side, Jiang Cheng muttered, "Oh god, please no."

Madam Mo pointed at her son's corpse, "The evidence is right here with my son! See for yourselves! A-Yuan's remains already told me who murdered him!"

Wei Wuxian pulled back the blanket and found that the corpse no longer had his left arm. The Lan disciples were startled upon seeing this.

Meanwhile, other cultivators in the cave also began discussing amongst each other, as if they didn't already know the outcome of this case.

Madam Mo continued her accusations against Wei Wuxian, sobbing all the while. At this moment, Wei Wuxian discovered something in the folds of Mo Ziyuan's robes. Lan Sizhui

noticed it too and crouched down to grab the material for everyone to see. It was one of the Spirit Attraction Flags!

Wei Wuxian murmured to himself, "... He had it coming!"

The scene suddenly changed, showing Mo Ziyuan sneaking out at night. While the cultivators were occupied with the walking corpses, he quickly stole one of the flags, stuffing it into his robes whilst smiling nastily.

"I knew it." Wei Wuxian pointed. No one refuted him.

Wei Wuxian looked down at his arms as he thought, 'I'm the one who created the Spirit-Attraction Flags.' Before his eyes, one of the scars faded away, leaving four left. 'And so, the sacrificial contract has deemed Mo Ziyuan's death as my doing. What a lucky hit.'

"Woah! That really is lucky, Senior Wei!" Lan Jingyi grinned at Wei Wuxian.

"Yeah, Senior Wei. Even though you created it, it's not really your fault. That Mo Ziyuan has no one to blame but himself." Ouyang Zizhen said. The other juniors nodded their heads around him.

Wei Wuxian's lips curled up, "I am pretty lucky, aren't I?" He turned his head to Hanguang-Jun with a smile, implying more than just his survival.

Madam Mo began to shake in rage and she threw a cup at Wei Wuxian, "If yesterday you didn't denounce him in front of so many people, would he have gone out in the middle of the night? It's all your fault, you son of a bitch!"

The Meishan Yu female cultivator snorted, "This woman is a piece of work. She'll defend her own son for anything, even if he dirtied his hands in murder." She hmphed, arms crossed under her chest.

Wei Wuxian dodged the flying cup as Madam Mo advanced on Sizhui, "And you! You bunch of useless fools! You cultivate and ward off evil spirits, but you can't even protect a child! A-Yuan is still so young!"

Lan Qiren and Lan Xichen pursed their lips at Madam Mo's words.

"So young?" Jin Ling said in disbelief, "And what am I? A toddler? This madam is really too coddling. It's not their fault that the brat didn't care to listen to the rules."

"Look at you, calling other people brats. Are you no longer one yourself?" Jiang Cheng commented, raising a brow at him.

Jin Ling huffed, "Of course not! Only you call me brat, Uncle!"

"Oh, you're going to be hearing a lot of that from my thoughts too." Wei Wuxian joined in.

Jin Ling sputtered, eyes dancing between the two before he looked away from his two uncles, acting like the brat that he was.

The Lan disciples were startled at the display Madam Mo showed against them. Wei Wuxian clicked his tongue and thought, 'It has been so many years, but the Lan Clan's values are still the same. What's the use of their so-called "self-restraint"? Watch me do this the right way!'

He shoved Madam Mo's hand away from Sizhui's collar, "Who do you think you're taking out your anger on? Do you really see them as your servants? They travelled far and wide to come here and exorcise evil spirits for you without taking a single penny, but you think that they owe you?"

Wei Wuxian continued, "How old is your son? He's probably at least seventeen by now, isn't he? He's still "a child"? Just how young of a child is he, since he doesn't understand basic human language?"

Lan Jingyi leaned in and whispered to Sizhui, "Wow, I almost forgot that when Senior Wei snaps, he gets really scary."

Lan Sizhui nodded.

Madam Mo tried to get in a word but Wei Wuxian cut her off, "Did they or did they not repeatedly tell him not to approach the West Courtyard or touch anything in the formation? Your son snuck outside at night on his own. Is it my fault? Or is it his?"

The juniors cheered and clapped at the end of Wei Wuxian's speech.

"You said it, Senior Wei!"

"Lay out the facts!"

"Look at her! She can't even say a word in defense."

Madam Mo shook her husband beside her, "Call everyone! Call everyone inside!" She was surprised when the man suddenly pushed her aside, causing her to fall. A servant hurriedly helped her.

"He already looks possessed here, how did we not notice?" Lan Jingyi sighed.

"At this angle, we should have known something wasn't right." Lan Sizhui remarked.

A-Tong led the master away. It was then that Wei Wuxian noticed that another cut had disappeared. There was a scream and everyone ran out to the courtyard find the husband lying on the ground, dead. A-Tong laid cowering beside it. Madam Mo ended up fainting and Sizhui approached A-Tong to ask him, "Did you see what it was?"

He shook his head. Wei Wuxian muttered to himself, "Taking the lives of two people within such a short period of time, it's level of brutality has to got to be exceptionally high."

Against the night sky, a signal of the Gusu Lan Sect exploded in the air.

The scene suddenly shifted to a figure in white seeing the signal. He gripped his sword tight and it zoomed out to reveal the wrapped guqin on his back.

Wei Wuxian instantly cheered, “It’s Hanguang-Jun! Lan Zhan, look it’s you! It’s you! Wow, you’re so handsome even when it’s just your back shown.” He sighed dreamily and Jiang Cheng shook his head in exasperation.

Lan Wangji raised his hand from Wei Wuxian’s waist to his head, rubbing him lightly. His voice was fond when he said, “Mm.”

“Only you would be so excited to see Hanguang-Jun on this thing,” Jin Ling muttered.

“That’s because Lan Zhan is the most handsome, most talented, most elegant man alive, he needs his beauty to be painted on the biggest canvas ever! Or the biggest screen in this case.” Wei Wuxian exclaimed, hands gesturing to show how grand he wanted it to be.

Jin Ling whispered to the Lan juniors, “Isn’t Lan Xichen on the number one list as the most handsome cultivator?”

Lan Jingyi opened his mouth to respond but Wei Wuxian, being the shameless eavesdropper that he is, beat him to it, “Brother Xichen *is* number one on the list but he’s not the one I'm married to, is he? Apologies for being biased, Sect Leader Lan.” He turned to grin cheekily at Lan Xichen who only chuckled.

“Completely understandable, Wuxian.”

“For the love of all things good, stop throwing rainbow farts about your husband and let us watch in peace.” Jiang Cheng groaned.

Wei Wuxian stuck out his tongue at him, “What are you gonna do? Make me shut up with Fairy? You've got no dog here. Bleh.”

“You—!”

“Wei Ying.” Lan Zhan called.

Wei Wuxian immediately clung onto Lan Wangji’s arm, shaking it as he spoke, “You agree with me right? A big painting of just your face?”

Lan Wangji was silent for a moment, staring at Wei Wuxian’s stunning grin, “I prefer Wei Ying’s. More beautiful.”

That got Wei Wuxian shocked into silence, stuttering, “L-Lan Zhan, you— how could you— *nhm* .” He ended up burying his red face onto Lan Wangji’s chest and his husband wrapped his arms around his blushing ~~wife~~ spouse, eyes back on the screen with a sort of satisfied air about him.

Everyone else just inwardly wanted to gouge their eyes out from the amount of dog food being force-fed in front of them.

Jingyi asked, “It would take at least an hour for our people to come here. What should we do now? We don’t even know what it was.

Lan Sizhui gritted his teeth, "We will wait here for the reinforcement! The spirit is most likely hidden among us. Let none of the people here leave!" He ordered, and the disciples shut the room while the others tended to the wounded.

Wei Wuxian sighed, 'It'd be quite a pain if the juniors brought over the "old acquaintance" of mine. But if I take my leave now, it's more than likely that everyone here will lose their lives.'

Hearing his thoughts, Wei Wuxian popped his head up from Lan Wangji's embrace, explaining, "It isn't a pain! It isn't a pain to see you. I just… I didn't think I'd find an ally in anyone if they found out I was back." He mumbled the rest, hoping Lan Wangji understood.

But he shouldn't have worried as Lan Zhan stroked the back of his hair, saying, "I already understand. Wei Ying does not have to explain."

Wei Wuxian smiled, feeling too lucky to have a husband like Lan Zhan at his side!

"Ah now, I'm so glad Senior Wei didn't leave." Lan Jingyi sighed, realizing how much of the events at that time had Wei Wuxian to thank for. The Lan clan juniors agreed amongst each other.

While Sizhui helped with Madam Mo, Jingyi was checking A-Tong's pulse when the servant suddenly opened his eyes. Wei Wuxian looked surprised when the servant suddenly grabbed his own neck and started choking himself.

Seeing this, Lan Sizhui tapped on a few of his acupoints three times. Wei WuXian watched, 'Although they looked gentle, the people from the Lan clan had arm strength that were the opposite. With a force like this, it would be hard for anyone to move.'

Jin Ling squinted at the Lan disciples, "Really?"

Lan Jingyi grinned and raised his hand to Jin Ling, "If you don't believe it, you can shake my hand to try."

Before Jin Ling actually tried it, Lan Sizhui pulled Lan Jingyi back by his collar, "I don't think that's a good idea. Our Gusu Lan sect punish disciples by making them handstand. We also use it as a form of training."

The juniors from other sects widened their eyes at this bit of knowledge. *How scary*, they thought.

However, A-Tong seemed like he didn't feel anything, and his left hand's grip tightened, his expressions looking more painful and twisted. There was a snap and A-Tong died.

The rest of the cultivators were also shocked. Although a lot of them had been made aware of Chifeng-zun's case, the details were still a mystery to them.

"What kind of devil spell is this?"

"Who could do such a thing!"

“Is the Yiling Patriarch really not responsible for this?”

The servants began to back away, scared and frightful, “...A ghost! There’s an invisible ghost in here and it made A-Tong strangle himself!”

The Lan disciples went to the walls, wondering, “The talismans show nothing… how…”

Jingyi asked Sizhui if he had any ideas on what to do now but Sizhui seemed speechless.

Sizhui sighed, “I was so useless at the time.”

“Hey, no, you’re not. You did great at leading the group. If it were me, I wouldn’t have known what to do at all, “Jingyi said, encouraging him.

Sizhui smiled, nuding him on the shoulder, “You would have thought of something too.”

Wei Wuxian thought as he watched the commotion, ‘The being killed three people at once and with such little time in between each kill. Even a well-known cultivator will have trouble immediately coming up with a solution, let alone these juniors who have just started their careers.’

Hearing this, Lan Xichen turned to the Gusu Lan disciples from that day, “None of us expected the level of danger you all had to go through but you all did very well, keeping a calm head while trying to control the situation to the best of your abilities.” He smiled especially at Jingyi and Sizhui, who bowed in gratitude to Lan Xichen. Lan Qiren gave a nod while stroking his beard.

All of a sudden, the candles were blown out and everyone screamed and panicked in the darkness. Lan Jingyi shouted, “Stand where you are! Don’t run around! It will catch whoever that runs!”

When Lan Sizhui ignited a Flame Talisman to light all the candles, it was then that Wei Wuxian noticed that all of the cuts on his arms were gone.

“That last one was the deepest and most hate-filled one.” Wei Wuxian mentioned since his thoughts didn’t say it.

“Of course, since Mo Xuanyu was abused the most by Madam Mo.” Ouyang Zizhen said.

“Maybe he also blames her for his mom’s death since she did nothing but ridicule her sister.” One cultivator mentioned.

“It’s a good thing all the cuts were gone just like that.” Jin Ling sighed in relief. When he saw the look Lan Jingyi was giving him, he scowled, “What?”

Lan Jingyi smirked, “Nothing. Just didn’t think I’d see you care so much about, Senior Wei.”

“Who says I care!” Jin Ling scowled. Wei Wuxian covered his mouth to hold back a snicker. These kids were just two cute, *ah!*

Wei Wuxian looked at the pale-faced Madam Mo who had just woken up, thinking, 'Only the death of Madam Mo could heal the wound. Which means… something was already possessing her body. If the being wasn't a spirit, then what was it?'

"So that hand of Chifeng-Zun took the lives of three Mo family members and a servant." A cultivator in grey robes suddenly spoke up, his voice resonating in the cave. He turned suspicious eyes at Wei Wuxian, "All of who happened to be Mo Xuanyu's targets to lift your curse. How… convenient."

"Are you also going to say that I'm the one who killed them?" Wei Wuxian asked, eyebrows raised.

The cultivator said, "Not directly, no, but you're still to be partially blamed for it. Otherwise, the curse wouldn't recognize their deaths as yours, right? The hand being there and your resurrection was definitely no coincidence. Somebody was working behind the scenes to make sure you lived and also eliminate the limitations of the curse, or else how could the hand only target these four people and not the other servants in the same house?"

Several people exchanged thoughtful and curious glances.

The man continued, shaking his head, "This person must have encouraged Mo Xuanyu to do the Body Offering ritual or at least steered him towards it, knowing what sort of wish he would make. Somebody definitely wanted to bring the Yiling Patriarch back… but for what?"

"Ey, I think you're just thinking too much into this, Brother Liu. What if the hand appeared because it sensed the Spirit-Attraction Flags? I heard that Chifeng-zun's body parts were scattered around the region, one may have been coincidentally at Mo Village and got triggered to life because of Mo Xuanyu's ritual."

"That's right. So much blood and resentment was used for that ritual to work." Another said.

"Then it targeting only those four people?" Brother Liu raised a brow.

The one who spoke to him first tried to think, "Well, we know why it attacked that young master first but for the others… a coincidence?" He shrugged. No one else could think of another reason either.

Meanwhile, Wei Wuxian couldn't help but be impressed. This Brother Liu managed to reach this conclusion already with so little clues, albeit already knowing beforehand that the thing killing people in the Mo Village was the hand of Nie Mingjue.

Nie Huaisang, who'd been silent this entire time, suddenly spoke up, "I don't think the person who's behind this would have been able to control big brother's hand and direct it to kill certain people only. Controlling such a thing would be impossible, even for a strong cultivator." His own disciples looked shocked that their Sect Leader had spoken but then they all gave words of agreement and support.

Wei Wuxian raised his brows and smirked at Nie Huaisang, thinking, 'Are you planning to stop acting like an idiot now that other people are going to connect the dots about you

eventually?'

A servant suddenly shouted that A-Tong's left hand was missing. When Wei Wuxian looked at it, he began to laugh.

Lan JingYi snapped, "What an idiot! How can he still laugh at such a time?!"

Wei WuXian tugged at his sleeve, "No, no!"

Lan Jingyi was annoyed and pulled back his sleeve, "What 'no'? You're not an idiot? Stop fooling around! Nobody has the time to pay attention to you."

Lan Jingyi, after facepalming himself, went to bow in apology to Wei Wuxian who just laughed, enjoying watching the way the junior treated him before.

"You shouldn't have laughed in such a situation to begin with. Really acting like a lunatic," Jiang Cheng said, shaking his head.

Wei WuXian went on to explain that Mo Ziyuan's dad and A-Tong's corpses weren't them anymore. He said he knew because when they'd hit him, they'd use their right hands, not their left.

Lan JingYi spat, "What are you being proud for? Look at how smug you are!"

One of the juniors gasped, "Wow, you actually said that to Senior Wei and lived."

Lan Jingyi just covered his face, not wanting to see his stupid past self anymore.

Thanks to Wei Wuxian's hint, Lan Sizhui figured out what was possessing them and discovered that Madam Mo's left hand wasn't right. He immediately commanded, "Hold her down!"

A few boys grabbed Madame Mo. Lan Sizhui said "Please excuse me" and was prepared to slap down a talisman when Madame Mo's left hand suddenly twisted in an absurd way, aiming for his throat.

"A-Yuan!" Wen Ning reacted, even though Lan Sizhui was safe and sound beside him.

Lan Sizhui smiled and briefly touched Wen Ning's arm.

Lan Jingyi was suddenly kicked by Wei Wuxian and the hand landed on his shoulder. Green flames ignited on it, making it loosen its grip. Lan Jingyi took off the other half of his uniform and scolded, "Why did you kick me, you lunatic? Did you want to kill me?"

Wei WuXian scampered away like a frightened rat, "It wasn't me!" But of course, it was. His thoughts explained that the stitches on the Lan clan's uniforms had incantations for protection but it became invalid once used.

Lan Sizhui bowed to Wei Wuxian, "Thank you for the quick save, Senior Wei."

Lan Jingyi also bowed but in apology again for almost hitting Wei Wuxian in his anger, now knowing that he was just protecting his friend. Though he was curious, “How did you know our uniforms had those?”

Wei Wuxian winked, “Haven’t you heard the stories? I studied in Gusu when I was younger.”

The juniors were quite interested hearing that, wanting to know more about the Yiling Patriarch’s past.

Wei Wuxian thought as he watched the hand detach itself from Madam Mo, ‘This is the creature that the Spirit-Attraction Flag summoned over— a left hand that wants to die as a whole corpse!’

The juniors watched with rapt attention as the Lan disciples fought with the hand while listening attentively to Wei Wuxian’s thoughts explaining how the dismembered hand with the resentment of the dead person would continue looking for its body parts by possessing and draining others until it was complete. They shuddered at the thought of ever coming face to face with a being like that, so they could only learn by watching this experience.

The boys from the Lan clan all took off their coats to cover the left hand. The layers of clothing looked like a white cocoon. After a second, the ball of white clothes ignited with a whoosh, creating a green, abnormal inferno. Lan Sizhui commanded, “Unsheath your swords and make a fence! We will have to manage until a senior comes.”

“Yes!”

While nobody was looking, Wei WuXian ran towards the West Courtyard. Wei Wuxian ruined the seal on the ten-or-so walking corpses the boys had subdued earlier and clapped his hand twice. Suddenly, the whites of the walking corpses’ eyes all turned upward.

Wei WuXian spoke, “Wake up. It’s time to work!”

Ouyang Zizhen blinked, “Eh, that’s it? You just clap your hands and they all start working for you?”

Wei Wuxian snickered, “Well if you’re the Grandmaster of Demonic Cultivation, controlling these walking corpses is as easy as breathing. But these ones were no good, though.”

As these walking corpses approached Wei WuXian, their legs grew weak and they collapsed onto the ground. His thoughts explained that these walking corpses hadn’t been trained by him so they couldn’t withstand direct manipulations from him. The crueler the being was, the better Wei WuXian could control it.

“Huh. So you can’t control corpses without resentment then?” One of the juniors asked.

“I could but I’d need tools to help me ease them to answer my commands.” Wei Wuxian said, smiling.

By the back of the cave, a cultivator whispered to her partner, "Look at him, teaching these young ones demonic cultivation."

"Someone should stop him."

Wei Wuxian traveled back to the East Courtyard, grabbed Madame Mo and Mo ZiYuan's corpses, and spoke in a low voice, "Wake up!" When they woke up, they started shrieking loudly. Wei WuXian smiled, feeling quite satisfied, "Do you recognize the hand outside?"

He commanded, "Tear it apart."

The three members of the Mo family began to attack the hand. His thoughts explained that because the ghost hand killed them, their resentment grew for it and Madam Mo was especially fierce. Meanwhile, the juniors were stricken dumb with amazement.

They all gaped as they saw the gore-splattered scene for the first time, unable to avert their gazes. They all thought that it was… Absolutely thrilling!

The juniors from other clans were completely hooked too.

"Woah look at those fierce corpses go!"

"Eww, his intestines spilled out."

"Wei Wuxian is really amazing!"

More cultivators' faces began to darken at the sound of the juniors' praises towards the Yiling Patriarch.

As Wei Wuxian attentively watched the battle, he thought about whistling to evoke even more hostility in the cruel corpses, but it would be difficult to ensure that nobody knew that it was his doing.

"Oh, I see. Jingyi would have probably given you away if he tattled to Hanguang-Jun about you." Jin Ling said, nodding. He smirked when Lan Jingyi gave an indignant, "Hey!"

Wei Wuxian flapped his hand, now realizing, "I should have just went with it even if Lan Zhan found out. I could trust him. I *should* have trusted him, even from the start." He mumbled in the end, leaning his head on Hanguang-Jun's shoulder.

As he was about to whistle, the echoes of two strums on a stringed instrument came from far away. Wei Wuxian's first thought was, 'It's him!?'

Instantaneously, the boys from the GusuLan clan started beaming. Lan Sizhui wiped the blood off his face and raised his head, happily exclaiming, "Hanguang-Jun!"

A beautiful man appeared on screen, standing on top of a roof with his guqin in hand, soundly subduing the three corpses and the hand easily. His fingers looked slender and flawless, as they strung on his instrument.

Many women sighed at the image of Lan Wangji and even Wei Wuxian couldn't help but compliment, "So beautiful, Lan Zhan. You made quite an entrance! Unlike me who was covered in blood and was kicked." He grinned up at his husband, admiring his jawline, high cheekbones and the light color of his eyes. Lan Wangji directed his eyes to his and Wei Wuxian gasped at the love he felt from his gaze alone.

After a short moment of silence, the boys cheered loudly. They all thought that even if they'd be punished because of reasons such as "being discourteous and making noise is harmful to the clan's reputation," they didn't care.

"You don't care, you say?" Lan Qiren spoke up, his eyes piercing the Lan disciples who shivered and tried to explain that they didn't mean that at all.

Lan Sizhui suddenly realized that Wei Wuxian was gone. He tugged Lan JingYi, "Where is he?"

Lan Jingyi was absorbed in the act of rejoicing, "Who? Which one?"

Lan Sizhui replied, "Young Master Mo."

Lan Jingyi said, "Hmm? Why are you looking for that lunatic? Who knows where he ran off to. He's probably frightened by my threats to hit him."

Lan Sizhui knew that Lan Jingyi had always been careless and straightforward, not thinking twice about anything or suspecting anyone. He thought, 'I'll wait for Hanguang-Jun to come, and then tell him about everything.'

Lan Jingyi copied the way Wei Wuxian faked cried earlier and turned teary eyes to his friend, "So that's how you think of me, Sizhui?"

"N-No, those were just observations I made… uh..." Lan Sizhui sweatdropped. He wished the screen would stop airing his thoughts to everyone like this.

"What a good boy A-Yuan is, reporting to Hanguang-Jun immediately about spotting his future husband." Wei Wuxian gleefully remarked.

On the screen, Wei Wuxian was shown eliminating all evidence of the sacrificial formation in Mo Xuanyu's room as fast as he could, before he ran out the door.

He began to sneak away, while lamenting, 'How unfortunate am I that the one who came just happens to be from the Lan clan, but even more unfortunately, he happened to be Lan WangJi!'

"Wah, inner thoughts stop speaking." Wei Wuxian complained, hugging Lan Wangji as if he could shield him from his thoughts. Lan Zhan only looked amused, though there was a shadow of regret in his eyes, a regret that he hadn't managed to reconcile with Wei Wuxian before his death, which made him think like this about him on his rebirth.

He sighed a little.

‘I’ve gotta find myself a mount and get away from here as soon as possible!’ He soon found a donkey tied to a stable. After much difficulty getting it to obey him, they went off onto the main path.

Chapter End Notes

somebody keep wangxian away from each other, they’re just spreading dog food while watching as if they’re on a date in the cinema XD

Also have i mentioned that i love the juniors? because *i love the juniors*

Next chapter:
- Jin Ling and Jiang Cheng's appearance!

see you next sunday~

Arrogance I-II

Chapter Notes

Happy Chinese New Year~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When the screen turned black, a cultivator took this opportunity to say, “So what’s the point of being shown this? Are we really supposed to believe that the Yiling Patriarch was actually a kind and benevolent soul this entire time?” He snorted disdainfully.

“Yeah, how do we know he isn’t just manipulating this thing to show us what he wants us to see?”

Others around them began to nod and shout their assent.

“He expects us to sympathize with him and forget all his wrongdoings!” One of them huffed.

A female cultivator pointed out, “Look at the children. They’ve even been brainwashed by him.”

Wei Wuxian shouldn’t have been surprised that these people would question the mysterious powers of this watching device and blame it on him too. He chuckled bitterly, “You guys keep overestimating my abilities, I really don’t know if I should be flattered or annoyed. I’d really like to hear from one of you how a *demonic* cultivator, who only manipulates corpses and the dead, can manage to extract his own thoughts and of other people into this moving image screen, and then trap everyone here by taking away their spiritual powers. Really, go ahead, I won’t even insult you if you manage to make a modicum of sense.”

Of course, as smart-mouthed cultivators went, they just sputtered and started pointing at Wei Wuxian in fury.

Lan Wangji stood beside his husband and grasped his hand, giving him support. He could feel how upset Wei Wuxian was and he wished he could find a way to get them out of here so that he would no longer have to face these people’s ridicule and prejudice again.

Lan Jingyi turned to his fellow Gusu Lan disciples and asked loudly, “Hey, did you guys notice anything different from what we’ve just seen to our own experiences in the Mo Village?”

The boys exchanged glances amongst each other before shaking their heads.

“No, it’s exactly the same.”

“Word for word!”

Lan Sizhui turned to him, “Jingyi?”

But Lan Jingyi just continued, an indignant look on his face, “Exactly! Everything Senior Wei said and did was exactly the same as we remembered it!”

He then turned to the cultivators badmouthing Wei Wuxian earlier, “Since we were present during the time of the event, we know best if Senior Wei had changed it or not, and everything was portrayed exactly as they were. Unless you, *Esteemed Lords,* are also going to say that the Yiling Patriarch is gifted in changing people’s memories? Then, he could have just wiped out all of your memories from thirteen years ago and be done with it, instead of going through this entire mess. Clearly, something this elaborate and powerful is too much for even Senior Wei to do so this humble disciple asks you, *Venerable Masters,* to stay patient and watch the truth unfold.”

Lan Jingyi finished by executing a perfect, perfunctory bow that would have made Lan Qiren proud had Jingyi not just offended nearly every senior cultivator in the room.

Not one to leave his friend hanging, Sizhui also bowed to the seniors, “I agree with Jingyi.”

“So do we.”

“Me too.”

The other Gusu Lan sect disciples bowed, and the cultivators were left speechless. How could they still argue against them when these juniors were the ones to have experienced what happened in Mo Village themselves?

“Sect Leader Lan! Are you just going to let your disciples talk to us this way?” Sect Leader Yao shouted, his face red with offence.

In contrast, Lan Xichen’s smile was calm and serene, “Apologies, Sect Leader Yao, but my disciple spoke every word with respect. I too would like to continue watching.”

Lan Qiren huffed, “Every one of you are growing bolder day after day. If there’s one thing the Yiling Patriarch is doing wrong, it’s making the Lan clan start acting out.” Though he said it like it was a disgrace, he did nothing to stop them.

Wei Wuxian smiled gratefully at the juniors, giving them a wink when they raised their eyes to him.

The scene showed a bright morning with Wei Wuxian standing by a well and the donkey he picked up at his side. The donkey was shown being very difficult as it brayed, kicked and spat out whatever straws Wei Wuxian tried giving it.

“My Lord, let’s get going after you finish these straws, alright?” Wei Wuxian tried to entice the donkey with the dry-looking straws in hand.

A few of the younger disciples chuckled, “You call your donkey lord?”

“Well, just look at him!” Wei Wuxian gestured to the screen and shook his head fondly, “Of course, I’d end up saddled with a donkey that had a hard butt and the personality of a young Lord.”

Then a group of people approached the field but they hesitated seeing Wei Wuxian’s hanged ghost look. So he moved over and emptied some space for them which made the group at ease and think he was harmless. The girl with them sat by the well and smiled at Wei Wuxian, as if she knew that he purposely moved away.

Wei Wuxian sneakily peeked up at his husband and noticed that he had his eyes averted, not watching the screen. He muffled a snicker in his free hand while squeezing Lan Wangji’s hand with the other.

One of the people held a compass and said, “We’re already at the foot of Dafan Mountain, so why hasn’t the pointer started moving yet?”

Wei Wuxian thought that this was probably a poor cultivation clan from the countryside who were out night hunting. He slouched against the tree and inwardly sighed, ‘I wonder if I’ll be able to get a good ghost to be my soldier over at that mountain.’

“Hear that! Wei Ying was planning to resurrect more ghost soldier for his evil doings!” A person from the outspoken group of cultivators pointed out.

“Well, I needed something to protect myself in case one of you people found out about me. What else did you think I was going to do?” He snorted.

Lan Wangji tightened their interlocked hands, grabbing Wei Wuxian’s attention, “I’m here.”

Wei Wuxian knew he meant that he would protect him and he smiled, “Yes, Lan Zhan, you’re better than any ghost soldier out there!”

Suddenly, the round-faced girl took a small, partly-ripened apple out of her basket and handed it to him, “Here you go.” Wei Wuxian extended his hand to receive it while grinning broadly, but the donkey opened its mouth and almost bit at it. Wei Wuxian quickly took the apple away.

“Hmph,” came the sound from Lan Wangji.

Wei Wuxian could no longer hold it in and he “*pffft* ” out loud.

“What’s funny, Senior Wei?” Sizhui asked.

“Nothing. Nothing.” Wei Wuxian said, grinning too wide to indicate that it wasn’t. He tiptoed to reach Hanguang-Jun’s ear, whispering, “What’s funny is that Lan Er-gege is drinking vinegar about a girl innocently giving me an apple.”

Wei Wuxian delighted in seeing Lan Zhan’s ears burn red before he heard the man say lowly, “I’m not.”

He snickered and patted his husband's shoulder, "Now, now, Lan Zhan, it's against the rules to lie. I'm yours and you're mine now. You have nothing to worry about."

Lan Wangji's eyes briefly fell on him, lingering on Wei Wuxian's smile before he brought them back to the screen, the smallest curl of his lips visible.

Wei Wuxian managed to get the donkey running faster by attaching the apple to a long rod, and letting it dangle in front of its eyes. They reached the town under the mountain before dark and there were several cultivators gathered there. Wei Wuxian passed by a group of them talking about his Compass of Evil and how it wasn't working.

His thoughts revealed that he didn't expect he would still be alive in cultivators' conversations even after so many years had passed. He mentioned that the Compasses of Evil in use today was the first version that he made so it wasn't perfect. He was in the middle of making improvements when his "den" was destroyed, so he had to put everyone through the inconvenience of using the imprecise version.

"Will you one day improve on the Compass of Evil, Senior Wei?" A junior from Baling Ouyang sect asked.

Sect Leader Ouyang snapped, "Why would you ask him, boy? He's the Yiling Patriarch. Don't associate yourself with him."

When the junior was cowered into silence, Ouyang Zizhen said, "But Dad, you always tell us to bring Spirit-Attraction Flags and a Compass of Evil during night hunts. Can't we ask the inventor himself some questions so we could improve our night hunting?"

Sect Leader Ouyang glared at his annoying son and wanted to slap him on the head.

"So what if we use his inventions? He should be honored that some of us even deign to use them when we could have thrown them away!" Some random cultivator exclaimed.

Wei Wuxian scoffed, "You say it as if I were selling them on the streets instead of you people raiding my stuff after my death."

That got the cultivator to shut up.

Wei Wuxian hopped off the donkey's back and let the donkey finally take a bite of the apple. He ate a few bites from the other side then stuffed the rest back into the donkey's mouth. Wei Wuxian pondered upon how he came down to the point of sharing an apple with a donkey, when someone suddenly bumped into his back. He turned around to see a girl whose eyes were dull and had a smile on her face, staring at the mountain without blinking.

All of a sudden, she started to dance in front of him without saying anything. An older woman came over to stop her and cried, "A-Yan, let's go back, let's go back!"

"What's wrong with her?"

"Is she possessed?" Many of the adults began speculating while some of the juniors sighed at the sight of her.

A-Yan brushed her off with force and continued to dance. The woman had to chase her down the street, sobbing while running. As street vendors sympathized over the Zheng's family situation, Wei Wuxian asked one of them to explain what happened to her.

'The creature devoured seven souls at a time. It sounds like a high-level soul-consuming spirit!' He concluded after hearing the story. He rode the mountain up slowly with his donkey and came across cultivators leaving with bitter looks on their faces. Wei Wuxian turned his head around and thought, 'Maybe they're frustrated because it's a strong prey? That's exactly what I'd hoped for!'

"Why didn't you just call for the Ghost General, Senior Wei?" One of the younger disciples asked, glancing at Wen Ning who mostly just stood quietly at the side and watched.

"Yeah, isn't this when you called the Ghost General to attack that soul-consuming spirit?" Another junior added.

Wei Wuxian shrugged in answer, "Well I would have if I had known he still existed. A certain someone wanted everyone to believe he'd been burnt to ashes many years ago. You'll see."

Wei Wuxian was out of earshot when the cultivators began talking,

"Did the leader of a big sect really need to fight over a soul-consuming spirit with us? He probably killed tons of them when he was young."

"What can we do? He's a sect leader. No matter which sect you choose to offend, you shouldn't offend the Jiang sect, and no matter which person you choose to offend, you shouldn't offend Jiang Cheng. Let's just pack up, leave, and feel sorry for ourselves!"

Jiang Cheng sneered, "Good that they know."

"If I had heard that conversation, I definitely wouldn't have gone up that mountain." Wei Wuxian pouted while Jiang Cheng just rolled his eyes at him.

"The way this is structured feels like a play." Nie Huaisang suddenly commented behind his fan.

Wei Wuxian turned to him questioningly, "What do you mean, Sect Leader Nie?"

"Ah, nothing. Nothing. I was just… " Nie Huaisang swallowed nervously when several pairs of eyes landed on him and he averted his gaze while fanning himself, "I just noticed that whoever made er… 'this' must be a very good storyteller. Like if I were the writer to this play, I would start at the most interesting part which I guess would be Wei-xiong's death because it also introduces the setting of the Four Great Clans and other characters like Sect Leader Jiang. So this part in the story where Wei-xiong didn't hear their conversation is like a foreshadowing technique to let the audience know that he'll be facing Sect Leader Jiang later. I-It builds up the… tension… " He petered off when he noticed that they were looking at him strangely and he couldn't help but tremble under the weight of their gazes.

He nearly jumped out of his skin when Wei Wuxian started clapping, “Excellent analysis skills, Sect Leader Nie. Who knew you could be so smart, huh?” He said, with a bit of an edge in his tone that no one except for Lan Wangji and Nie Huaisang noticed.

Nie Huaisang laughed nervously, whilst discreetly wiping his sweat, “I don’t really know much, Wei-xiong, ha ha… You know I just like to read in my spare time so that’s why uh… ”

“So it’s a possibility that this anonymous cultivator or whatever they are is a storyteller?” Jiang Cheng said, brow raised.

“Maybe or maybe not.” Wei Wuxian replied, stroking his chin.

Wei Wuxian suddenly heard cries for help. He directed the donkey toward the direction of the voices and found cultivators hanging on the trees by a huge, golden web.

Jin Ling suddenly looked alive, “Hey, hey, I’m about to appear.”

“Yeah, we know.” Lan Jingyi said, dampening Jin Ling’s excitement.

A boy wearing a light-colored robes emerged from within the dark forest. Wei Wuxian silently exclaimed, ‘A young master of the Lanling Jin Sect. How wealthy!’

The young master said in an annoyed tone, “I find you idiots every single time. There are more than four hundred deity-binding nets in the mountain, but you guys have already broken ten or so, and I haven’t even seen the prey yet!”

Wei Wuxian thought, again, ‘Super wealthy!’

“Is that all you can think about me?” Jin Ling couldn’t hold back asking. He thought Wei Wuxian would have had more thoughts about him other than his wealth.

Wei Wuxian snorted, “Don’t worry, you’ll be hearing a lot more.”

The middle-aged man spoke with tolerance, “Please, Young Master, do us a small favor and let us down.”

The boy crossed his arms, “You guys should just stay here, in case you mess around and get in my way again! I’ll let you down after I catch the spirit-consuming beast, that is, if I still remember you.”

Jin Ling flushed. Even he could hear how arrogant he sounded to his own ears.

“Who taught you to act like this, huh?” Jiang Cheng barked, slapping the back of Jin Ling’s head.

Jin Ling squacked and rubbed where he’d been hit, shouting back, “Who else but you, Uncle!”

“You brat!”

The juniors and Wei Wuxian snickered quietly at their interactions.

The donkey suddenly leaped forward and made a long braying sound. Unprepared for this, Wei Wuxian was thrown off of its back. The boy looked at him in shock which quickly turned into disdain. "So, it's you!"

Wei Wuxian thought, 'He knows Mo Xuanyu?'

The boy spoke again, "Did you lose your marbles after you were kicked out and thrown back to your village? How could they let you outside when you look like this?"

But in Wei Wuxian's head, he suddenly realized that Mo Xuanyu's father isn't the head of some small sect, but the famous Jin Guangshan.

"Out of that, you realized Mo Xuanyu was the son of Jin Guangshan?" Lan Jingyi asked, flabbergasted.

"Senior Wei is a genius. I'm not surprised he processes things faster than others." Lan Sizhui explained with a smile.

"Ey, you're right about that, Sizhui! Otherwise, how can I teach you guys how to night hunt if I don't think fast enough to stop you kids from dying early." Wei Wuxian said, patting his chest proudly.

Seeing that Wei Wuxian was spacing out, the boy grew even more annoyed, "Why are you just standing there? It's time for you to get lost! Just looking at you makes me want to puke, you damn lunatic!"

Wei Wuxian thought that even if not for his own sake, he needed to return the humiliation for Mo Xuanyu's body, "Hmph, what an attitude! I suppose you didn't have a mother to teach you?"

Jin Ling suddenly gripped his bow tight. He unsheathed the sword on his back and threatened, "What… did you say?"

Most of the juniors winced, knowing how sensitive Jin Ling was whenever his parents were mentioned.

Wei Wuxian sighed, rubbing his neck. He turned to Jin Ling whose mouth was pursed in a line, "I'm sorry."

Jin Ling glanced at him with wide eyes before looking away, "You already apologized before. Or did you forget?"

"I know but what I said to you always deserves an apology."

Before Jin Ling could respond, Jiang Cheng cut in, "Let him, A-Ling."

Jiang Cheng had his brows furrowed in a scowl and he wasn't looking at Wei Wuxian either.

'The sword looks a bit familiar doesn't it?' but before Wei Wuxian could figure out why, the boy wielded his sword and came toward him. Wei Wuxian fished a piece of human-shaped paper out of the spirit-locking bag. As he avoided the attack, he slapped the paper onto the boy's back.

"How could you not recognize Suiha right away?" Jin Ling frowned, arms crossed as he watched himself getting easily pushed down by Wei Wuxian's tricks.

"It's been a long time since I've last seen it." Wei Wuxian muttered.

Wei Wuxian thought, 'Ghostlings may be weak but they are completely capable at dealing with brats like this one.'

"There you go, a new thought about you." Wei Wuxian grinned to Jin Ling who only rolled his eyes. He did not appreciate being called a brat, okay!

Wei Wuxian picked up his sword and swung it towards the direction of the deity-binding net, splitting it in half. The family fell to the ground and sprinted off without a word. Meanwhile, the boy on the ground was fuming, "You damn gay! Good for you, taking this sort of wrong path because you didn't have enough spiritual powers to do anything! Watch out for your life! Do you know who came today?"

Lan Jingyi noticed Jin Ling had a look of disdain on his face while hearing his past self talk and he snorted. He nudged the Jin disciple, "Join the party. You're gonna keep regretting a lot of things from now on."

Jin Ling grimaced and no longer seemed excited to see his appearances on screen.

"Oh, I'm so scared!" Wei Wuxian mocked. The boy pushed on the ground, but couldn't get up even after a few tries. His face was scarlet and he gritted his teeth, "Take this thing off right now… If you don't, I'm gonna tell my uncle, and you're gonna wait for your death!"

Wei Wuxian wondered, "Why is it your uncle, not your dad? Who's your uncle, again?"

"Ah," Wei Wuxian laughed nervously, "I should stop asking about kid's parents before karma hits me."

"Too late for that." Jiang Cheng huffed, already knowing he was appearing next.

A voice suddenly came from behind him which greatly shocked Wei Wuxian. "I'm his uncle. Do you have any last words?" Jiang Cheng frowned, "Jin Ling, why did you linger for so long? Do you really need me to come and pick you up? Look at what a terrible situation you're in right now, and get up!"

'He's… Jiang Cheng's nephew… He's… Shijie's child!' Wei Wuxian numbly thought. He curled a finger inside his sleeve and made the piece of paper retreat. Jin Ling immediately rolled up and grabbed his sword in the process. He shifted near Jiang Cheng and pointed at Wei WuXian accusingly, "I'm gonna break your legs!"

Jiang Cheng moved his finger and the paper doll swiftly flew out of Wei Wuxian's hand and into his own. Rage crossed his face and he ignited the paper in his fingers. He spoke grimly, "Break his legs? Haven't I told you? If you see this sort of evil and crooked practices, kill the cultivator and feed him to your dogs!"

"Jiang Cheng, I hope from now on you're kinder to people like me." Wei Wuxian pouted, watching his past self backing away from the two people whose lives he messed up the most and tried escaping.

Jiang Cheng clicked his tongue, "As long as they don't act like you, we'll see."

'Has his hatred towards me been vented on anyone who cultivates to imitate me?' He wondered as he ran.

"You can't run!" Jin Ling's attacks became more aggressive. Wei Wuxian slid two fingers into the spirit-locking bag, about to take something out, when suddenly, the blue glare of a sword slashed out. It collided with Jin Ling's sword, breaking the powerful sword's golden rays in an instant. Wei Wuxian fell toward the ground, right on top of a pair of snow-white boots. After pausing for a moment, he slowly lifted his head.

"Hanguang-Jun to the rescue!" Wei Wuxian cheered, hugging Lan Wangji's arm. "You didn't even know it was me but you saved me. We're really fated huh?"

Lan Wangji gave a small nod. The juniors decided not to say that Hanguang-Jun would have done it for any helpless person too.

Wei Wuxian saw his light-colored eyes and he stared. The blade was inserted back into the scabbard and at the same time, Jiang Cheng's voice came from afar, "And I was wondering who it was. So, it's you, Second Young Master Lan."

The pair of white boots passed around Wei Wuxian while he got up. As he walked past the former, slightly brushing their shoulders, he made eye contact with him for a short moment.

"Lan Zhan, whoever this storyteller is, they're doing a great job at giving you very nice angles of your face," Wei Wuxian sighed, staring at the beauty that was his husband.

Meanwhile, many female cultivators cursed the Yiling Patriarch in their hearts for marrying the most sought after man in the cultivation world. They could only sigh and lament at their poor luck in trying to find a husband as good as Hanguang-Jun.

Two capitalized words jumped into Wei Wuxian's mind: Mourning clothes!

He thought that even though Lan Wangji was an incomparable beauty who only appeared once in a blue moon, nothing could help the bitter facial expression that made him look as though his wife had passed away.

The Gusu Lan disciple, who was still miffed about their clan's uniform being insulted, muttered under his breath, "Mourning clothes… how dare he compare these magnificent uniforms to mourning clothes?"

Wei Wuxian was more preoccupied by what his thoughts just said aloud. “Lan Zhan, that uh… just forget what you heard.” He could already feel the stink eye Lan Qiren was giving him from the back.

Lan Wangji was silent, staring straight ahead as he stood motionlessly in front of Jiang Cheng. Wei Wuxian couldn’t help but think that Jiang Cheng was already exceptionally handsome, but as they stood face to face with each other, he still seemed a few degrees inferior.

Jiang Cheng rolled his eyes, “I’m not even going to comment on that.”

“I’m glad you know when to admit defeat, Jiang Cheng.” Wei Wuxian smirked. Jiang Cheng only gritted his teeth and glared at him.

He raised one brow and spoke, “HanGuang-Jun, you sure live up to your reputation of ‘being wherever the chaos is’. So, you had time to come to this remote area today?” The juniors who came following Lan Wangji didn’t seem comfortable hearing Jiang Cheng's not-so polite tone

Lan Jingyi spoke straightforwardly, “Isn’t Sect Leader Jiang here as well?”

Wei Wuxian giggled, “This is why I love Jingyi.”

Lan Jingyi’s eyes brightened upon hearing that.

“But proper conduct should always be observed.” Lan Wangji interjected and the junior slightly deflated whilst nodding.

Jiang Cheng mocked Lan Wangji and his disciples. But Lan Wangji signaled Lan Sizhui to take over, “Young Master Jin, night-hunts have always been fair competition amongst the different clans and sects. However, to set up nets all over Dafan Mountain is clearly hindering the cultivators, causing them to fall into the traps. Is this or is this not against the rules of night-hunting?”

Jin Ling’s grim expression was exactly the same as his uncle’s, “What can I do? It was their own fault for stepping into the traps. I’ll solve everything after I finish capturing the prey.”

Lan Wangji silenced Jin Ling with a spell and Jiang Cheng barked out, “You, with the surname Lan! What do you mean by this? Jin Ling isn't yours to discipline so release the spell, now!”

Lan Sizhui spoke up, “Sect Leader Jiang, there is no need for anger. As long as he does not break the spell forcefully, it would release on its own, after thirty minutes.”

Before Jiang Cheng opened his mouth, a purple-clothed man in the Jiang Sect’s uniform ran toward them and revealed some bad news.

The man spoke in a low voice, “Not long ago, a blue sword flew over and destroyed the deity-binding nets that you had set up.”

Jiang Cheng glanced at Lan Wangji harshly, his displease plastered all over his face, "How many were broken?"

The man replied carefully, "... All of them..."

That's more than four hundred! Jiang Cheng seethed with anger. Wei Wuxian, while standing between the two, thought, 'Losing the nets were a small matter, but losing face was not.' With Lan Wangji's actions, Jiang Cheng felt a whirlpool of anger at the bottom of his heart, rising higher by every second. He narrowed his eyes, his left hand casually stroking the ring on his right hand's index finger, thinking of attacking him.

"Ah, Jiang Cheng, your thoughts are just as I expected, it's no fun hearing them." Wei Wuxian said, breaking the silence that had descended them when Sect Leader Jiang's thoughts rang deadly and dangerous down everyone's spines.

"Why does it feel like Sect Leader Jiang is so much scarier here?" Lan Jingyi whispered to Lan Sizhui, glancing at said man who didn't even bat an eye when his intentions to fight Hanguang-Jun became clear. Whether they were spoken out loud or not, it was written all over his face already.

Chapter End Notes

it's almost 4 am orz imma edit any mistakes when i wake up lol

*updated 01/27/2020

Next chapter: the dancing goddess statue and wen ning? i wanna try reaching lan zhan finding out wifi is alive tho so we'll see XD

CHAPTER WILL BE POSTED MONDAY!! because it got longer than I expected, sorry 🙏

Arrogance III-IV

Chapter Notes

update: edited 02/04/20

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After stroking his ring for a while, Jiang Cheng restrained his hostility. As sect leader, he couldn't be as impulsive as Jin Ling, and without complete confidence in his success, he would not consider fighting with Lan Wangji.

"Wow, how mature of you, Sect Leader Jiang." Wei Wuxian muttered, giving his martial brother a side glance.

Jiang Cheng narrowed his eyes at him, "Shut up."

Jiang Cheng turned to Jin Ling who was still covering his mouth angrily, "Hanguang-Jun wants to punish you, so just let him do it this one time. It's not easy for him either to discipline juniors from other clans." His tone was sarcastic, but it wasn't clear who he was mocking. Meanwhile, Lan Wangji looked as if he didn't hear anything.

Jiang Cheng snapped when Jin Ling did nothing, "Why are you still standing there? Waiting for the prey to come and throw itself onto your sword? If, today, you don't catch the creature hunting Dafan Mountain, don't come to me ever again!"

The juniors sweatdropped. They had all heard tales about Sandu Shengshou, some great and some downright terrifying. Wasn't he the Sect Leader who would previously capture those who practiced demonic cultivation like Wei Wuxian and then torture them day and night to see if they were possessed by the Yiling Patriarch. If they had an uncle like that, they'd probably pee themselves in their pants.

Suddenly, a huge respect for Jin Ling emerged in the juniors' hearts.

When Jin Ling left, Lan Sizhui spoke, "Sect Leader Jiang, the Gusu Lan Sect will return the exact number of spirit-binding nets that had been destroyed."

Jiang Cheng sneered, "No need," and left. After their figures disappeared, Lan JingYi spoke, "Why is Sect Leader Jiang like this?" Then he paled and shut his mouth, recalling the Lan sect rule of not talking behind other's backs. He looked meekly at Hanguang-Jun.

Lan Jingyi grimaced, slapping his mouth repeatedly for speaking his mind all the time. It was a wonder Hanguang-Jun didn't punish him after that, though a lot of things happened that day. Maybe he should take a page from Sizhui's book and learn how to be more quiet and patient. Steeling himself, he turned and bowed to Sect Leader Jiang.

“Lan Jingyi apologizes to Sect Leader Jiang for his poor manners and rude speech.”

Jiang Cheng only inclined his head in acknowledgment and didn’t speak a word, knowing brats like Jingyi would keep doing the same thing even if they apologized. How could he not know when he’d grown up with someone like Wei Wuxian?

Lan Sizhui smiled softly toward Wei Wuxian, “Young Master Mo, we meet again.”

Wei Wuxian said, “I’m still here, all thanks to these boys, it seems.”

“Sizhui is really polite, huh? Even though Senior Wei acted like a lunatic as Young Master Mo, he still greets him like an old friend.” One junior commented.

“Yeah, I noticed that too. Hey Sizhui, did you already get the feeling that Young Master Mo seemed different?” His friend asked the Lan head disciple.

Sizhui pondered, “I’m not sure. I just… felt like greeting him all the time.”

While listening to them, Wei Wuxian grinned and whispered to Hanguang-Jun, “Maybe you cast a spell on Sizhui to always find his way back to me. Don’t think I didn’t notice the courtesy name you gave him.” Even though his eyes were teasing, his smile was soft, completely enamored by this man who constantly showed in many ways how much he loved Wei Wuxian.

Lan Wangji stroked a hand down Wei Wuxian’s back and smiled very softly, “Maybe.”

Lan Wangji spoke, “Do your tasks.” The juniors replied in unison. After a moment, he instructed, “Do what you can. Don’t force yourselves.” Wei Wuxian couldn’t help but think his voice was deep and alluring, making one’s heart tremble when listening closely to it.

Jiang Cheng choked and Lan Xichen’s brows rose. Those two weren’t even together yet, but Wei Wuxian was already describing Lan Wangji like a lover.

Wei Wuxian went red but... was he lying? He grinned, “You already know how much I love your voice, right, Lan Zhan?” Wei Wuxian coquettishly asked his husband and though Lan Wangji stood like an immovable pillar, he couldn’t hide his red ears from him.

“Shameless.”

The juniors walked into the depths of the forest. Wei Wuxian thought that Jiang Cheng and Lan Zhan were really different from each other with how they order their disciples. While thinking, he suddenly saw Lan Wangji give an almost unnoticeable nod to him.

Wei Wuxian immediately returned it, ‘This is to thank me for helping out the Lan Sect’s juniors, isn’t it?’ When he looked up again, Lan Wangji had already disappeared.

“Did you have an inkling of who I was then?” Wei Wuxian asked, curious.

Lan Wangji shook his head, his brows the slightest bit drawn.

Wei Wuxian turned around to travel down the mountain, 'No matter what prey resides in Dafan Mountain, I won't be able to take it anymore. I, Wei Wuxian, would fight for it with anyone but Jin Ling. Why did it turn out to be Jin Ling?'

"Why? What's wrong with me?" Jin Ling asked without thinking. Wei Wuxian's thoughts made it sound as if he hadn't wanted to see him, hurting him a bit. Wei Wuxian had always seemed to show that he cared for him, saving his life every time. And wasn't he martial brothers with his uncle?

Wei Wuxian sighed, "Just keep listening." He knew where his thoughts were going.

"I...I actually said those words to him…" After a moment, Wei WuXian suddenly gave himself a slap on the face, loud and hard.

Jin Ling, and many of the other juniors, jolted at the sound. They hadn't expected that.

Jiang Cheng frowned, "You think one slap is enough?"

Wei Wuxian turned to him and offered his other cheek, "Then would you like to give me another?"

Jiang Cheng didn't rise to the bait and only looked away in irritation. He hadn't planned on doing anything but the death glare Lan Wangji was giving him over Wei Wuxian's shoulder made him throw an angry scowl back.

The young master of the Jin Clan looked at Wei Wuxian with complicated eyes. He hadn't expected the man to feel so remorseful about what he said to him. It made Jin Ling wonder how close Wei Wuxian was to his mother. His entire life, he'd been told that his mother was killed by the Yiling Patriarch, that he was the reason why he had to grow up orphaned and isolated. He had learned then to hate Wei Wuxian with every fiber of his being, but after the events in Guanyin Temple, he didn't know anymore.

The donkey approached Wei Wuxian on its own and it neighed, just as a wave of cultivators approached from the bottom of the hill. The disciples from different sects complained, "Both the Jin Sect and the Jiang Sect spoil Young Master Jin too much. He's still so young, but he's already this arrogant and rude. If they let him have the Lanling Jin Sect, who knows what would happen? I don't think we'd survive."

Jiang Cheng scowled. He hated hearing this kind of gossip from people. Why couldn't they just learn to mind their own fucking business?

A female cultivator sighed, "How can they not spoil him? He lost both his parents at such a young age."

"Shimei, that's not how it works. So what, if both his parents died? There are tons who lost both of their parents. If everyone acted like him, then what would happen?"

"I'm surprised that Wei Wuxian was cruel enough to harm her. Jin Ling's mother was Jiang Cheng's elder sister by blood— She was Wei Wuxian's shijie, the one who brought him up."

"It really was too bad for Jiang Yanli, raising a wolf that turned to bite her own hand. Jin Zixuan had it even worse. Just because he had something to do with Wei Wuxian, he ended up like that."

Jin Ling gripped his sword tight. He didn't care about the rumors about him. He'd heard every single one of them and several times too, thanks to Jin Chan and his friends throwing them at his face. But trying to understand the knots between his parents and Wei Wuxian put his thoughts and emotions in a turmoil.

"Why does Wei Wuxian have something to do with everyone…"

"Indeed. Have you heard him being close with anyone other than the mad dogs he raised? His enemies were everywhere, and he did wrong to everyone. Even with Hanguang-Jun, they were like fire and water, hating each other."

"Speaking of it, if it wasn't for Hanguang-Jun today…" Their voices faded in the distance.

Hearing someone say that Hanguang-Jun and Wei Wuxian had hated each other before made some cultivators and the juniors feel a bit incredulous now. How could they not when the two cultivators in question were currently in love and happily married. Although, it did make them wonder how these two well-known cultivators, who seemed as different as day and night, could act so lovey-dovey now. Wei Wuxian had only resurrected a few months ago but he already went and got married to the highly renowned and respected Hanguang-Jun. If they had really hated each other, then they wouldn't have easily gotten together so fast, right?

Could it be that things weren't really as it seemed and this strange storytelling was meant to show them the truth?

Wei Wuxian came upon a running river and decided to remove this ridiculous makeup. He lifted his dripping wet palms and wiped away the powder on his face. A handsome, graceful youth appeared in the reflection of the water. He looked as pure as if he had been cleansed by moonlight, with smooth brows, bright eyes, and lips curving slightly upward.

"I have to give him some credit, Lan Zhan," Wei Wuxian began, gently nudging his husband's shoulder, "He really got me a pretty body to inhabit. Pretty enough for the great Lan Wangji to have his fun with, even though it'll never match to Hanguang-Jun's beauty." He teased, a naughty smirk curling on his lips.

Lan Wangji simply answered him, "Wei Ying is beautiful in any body."

Thump thump. Wei Wuxian scowled, his face burning red, "Lan Zhan! Warn a man when you say things like that."

Then to Wei Wuxian's disbelief, Lan Zhan had the nerve to smirk (very, very slightly) at him!

"E-Even if I were a pimply-faced lady or a fat, old man?" He challenged, though there was no use testing Lan Zhan when he already knew his answer.

Lan Wangji gazed down into Wei Wuxian's eyes and carefully curled a stray strand behind his ear, whispering, "Even then."

Wei Wuxian really, really wanted to kiss his husband right now.

Someone suddenly cleared his throat, breaking the couple's intense eye contact. Lan Xichen said, "Wangji, Wuxian, I hope you can keep in mind uhm," he coughed slightly, "other people's presence while displaying forms of affection in public." The smile on his face showed that he was not bothered himself and was only saying this for their uncle's sake.

Wei Wuxian glanced behind Lan Xichen and almost guffawed. Lan Qiren's scowl seemed to be permanently etched on his face

After sulking for a bit, the donkey tugged on Wei Wuxian's collar and he decided to follow him. In the grass, he found a qiankun bag and fished out a gloom-burning talisman. Immediately, a ball of fire appeared in his hand. Wei Wuxian shouted, "Dead souls, manifest!"

An old man appeared, sitting with his back to him under a tree. When Wei Wuxian slowly approached, he realized that this was a ghost who had been killed with a weapon smashed to his head. 'He's dressed in rich burial robes which means he's already been buried properly. This isn't the soul that a living human had lost. But there's no way for a ghost like this to appear on Dafan Mountain.'

"That's right, how could it be a soul-consuming beast when there are ghosts like this on the mountain?" A cultivator commented, totally enraptured with the case.

His fellow martial brother looked at him strangely, "Have you not heard the story about the statue goddess yet?"

The cultivator's eyes widened, "Was there one? I might not have paid attention, hehe." he scratched his head in embarrassment.

"Have you been living under a rock? Well, you'll see soon enough."

Wei Wuxian muttered worriedly, "Something's not right. Jin Ling's still on the mountain. I have to go back and look."

Jin Ling couldn't explain the warmth in his chest as he watched Wei Wuxian jump onto the donkey's back and ride up the mountain.

Around the area of the ancient tombs, there were a lot of cultivators. Wei WuXian pulled on the reins, scanned around, and asked in a loud voice if anyone saw where the Jin and Lin Clan went. One cultivator answered him that they went to the Goddess Temple. The girl whom he met before pointed up a path where the cave temple resided. When asked which deity the temple was built for, he was told it was just a natural stone statue of a goddess. He gave his thanks and left.

Wei Wuxian thought, 'The sluggard's marriage, lightning that destroyed coffins, the fiance eaten by wolves, the father and daughter losing their souls, the extravagant burial clothes. So that's why the Compasses of Evil aren't picking up anything, and the spirit-attraction flags didn't work either. Everyone has underestimated the creature on Dafan Mountain. It's not at all what they think it is!'

"Eh, what is it? What is it? Is it the goddess statue?" The same ignorant cultivator asked, "but why?"

His martial brother rolled his eyes, "Yes, yes, it is."

"But I don't get why a goddess statue would do that. Do you?"

"O-Of course I do, I just forgot some details." He said, clearly not entirely knowledgeable of the events.

Lan Jingyi said to Sizhui with a shake of his head, "Even if I saw that old man ghost, I don't think I would have pieced the clues together as fast as Senior Wei had."

Lan Sizhui patted his shoulder, "Senior Wei has had more experience in dealing with ghosts and spirits than us."

Lan Jingyi nodded, "That's true."

The scene then changed to the Goddess Temple as it showed Lan Sizhui and the other disciples searching for clues inside. Lan Jingyi lifted and lowered the Compass of Evil, but its pointer still didn't move. He fanned the air in front of his nose and spoke, "The locals said that it is quite effective to pray at Goddess Temple, but how can it be this ruined? They should at least come and clean once in awhile."

"Interesting." Nie Huaisang said, patting his closed fan against his chin.

"What is, Sect Leader?" One of the Nie disciples with him asked.

Nie Huaisang glanced at him from the corner of his eyes. He gave a shy, hesitant smile, "Oh, I-I just meant the sudden perspective change."

When the Nie disciple just tilted his head in confusion, Nie Huaisang shook his head, "Nevermind. It's nothing." He then snapped his fan open and fanned himself lightly, thinking, 'I wonder whose stories will also be revealed in connection with Wei Wuxian.'

Lan Sizhui spoke, "There has already been seven people who lost their souls. Everyone is saying that lightning has let out a fierce creature from the ancient graves of Buddha's Feet, so would anybody dare to come up the mountain? There is no attendance at the temple and so, naturally, there is nobody to clean the place."

A disdainful voice came from outside of the cave, "It's only a stupid rock, given the title of a goddess by who-knows who, and people dare to put it here to receive incense and worship!"

Jin Ling groaned and pointed threateningly to the junior disciples around him, “Not—one—word.”

“Jin Ling?” Lan Sizhui said while Lan Jingyi muttered, “Damn, seems like the silence spell has lifted.”

"Now, you probably wish you still were, huh?" Lan Jingyi smirked, and Jin Ling resisted the urge to run him through with his sword.

Jin Ling came inside, with his hands crossed behind his back. He looked at the goddess statue and humphed, “These rural villagers don’t work hard when they face difficulties, but instead pray to the Buddha and other things every day. There are thousands and millions of people in the world, but gods and Buddhas are already hands-full with their own matters, so who would care about them? Let alone a powerless goddess without status, like this one. If it’s really so incredible, then I’m gonna pray for the soul-consuming creature in Dafan Mountain to appear in front of me right now. Can the statue do it?”

Jiang Cheng slowly turned to his nephew, a menacing glower on his face, “I don’t recall you reporting to me this particular detail, Jin Ling?”

Jin Ling paled, forgetting that he had in fact bragged to his uncle a few things he did to the goddess but definitely not the part about making a wish himself. Fuck, his stupid mouth!

When Jin Ling mulishly didn’t answer, Jiang Cheng pinched his ear, making him yelp, and scolded some more, “Are you just going to ignore me, huh? When will you learn not to recklessly run your mouth? How can you be a Sect Leader acting so childish?”

Jin Ling managed to pull away and rubbed his aching ear, “I know my mistakes already, uncle! You don’t have to say it.”

Jiang Cheng huffed, “If I don’t say it, then how will it stick in your head?”

“I’m not—!”

“Jin Ling,” Wei Wuxian interjected, a suspicious smile on his face, “Look at your uncle. He loves you so much he can’t help but scold you to death because he doesn’t want you getting hurt. Aww, isn’t that cute? My, my what an adorable family you two make.”

Shocked speechless by Wei Wuxian’s words, Jiang Cheng and Jin Ling ended up making similar constipated looks which elicited smattering chuckles from the juniors and cultivators.

Jiang Cheng opened his mouth to shout, “You—!” before he decided better of it and just continued watching with a huff.

A few cultivators from smaller clans laughed and agreed with him. “That’s right! Well said, Young Master Jin!” The originally quiet temple became bustling with noise.

“Hey, look I’m there!”

“I see myself too!”

A few juniors began to excitedly point out their appearances on screen.

Lan Jingyi palmed his forehead in irritation, "It is so loud." Meanwhile, Lan Sizhui was looking at the goddess statue's face, "I feel that this… has something wrong with it." Suddenly, someone shouted, "Hey! Are you okay? Somebody collapsed!"

Jin Ling spoke in a vigilant tone, "What happened to him?"

Lan Jingyi asked hesitantly, "Was his soul… consumed?"

Lan Sizhui examined the cultivator, "He seems as if…"

The dark cave abruptly lit up, covered in a red light that had everyone either drawing their swords or taking out their talismans. But Wei Wuxian burst into the temple and splashed alcohol toward the stone statue which sprouted raging flames. Wei Wuxian shouted, "Everyone, go back outside! Be cautious of the soul-consuming goddess!"

The screen then showed that the statute had changed positions. It lifted one foot and stepped out of the fire. Wei Wuxian told the cultivators again, "Run, run, run! Stop slashing at it! It won't work!"

Many of the cultivators who'd been there felt a little guilty for not listening as soon as he warned them, but how could they follow so easily when the prey they'd been hunting all day was finally in sight?

Everyone eventually rushed outside but Wei Wuxian couldn't find Jin Ling. He rode on the donkey and encountered the juniors from the Lan Clan.

Wei Wuxian called, "Kids!"

Lan Jingyi replied, "Who are your kids? Do you know which sect we are from? Did you really think that just because you washed your face you would be considered our senior? Hmph!"

Lan Jingyi was already bowing to Wei Wuxian before his past-self even finished speaking. Truly, truly… which deity had he offended to make him speak so brazenly about his seniors like Jiang Cheng and Wei Wuxian, and have them repeated to almost every cultivator in the country.

Lan Qiren shook his head, "Wangji, you better be keeping count."

Hanguang-Jun replied with a small nod, "I am."

Lan Jingyi wilted, knowing they were talking about his punishments, and looked as if death was near. Wei Wuxian snickered, feeling bad for the poor guy, "Hey, Jingyi," he whispered and smiled when the junior looked up at him, "When you finish with your punishments, I can treat you to some Emperor's Smile, what do you think?" He grinned, thinking this was a good idea to brighten someone up.

“Senior Wei, with all due respect,” Lan Jingyi said lifelessly, “If I hang out with you and your life gets viewed to everyone again, I don’t think I’ll survive a second time.”

Wei Wuxian sweatdropped. That was… a reasonable concern.

Wei Wuxian spoke, “Okay, okay, okay, gege-s. Send a signal and get your clan’s… Hanguang-Jun up here!”

The juniors nodded and searched for signals in their robes. They hesitantly said, “The signal fireworks… were all used up that night at Mo Village.”

Wei Wuxian was shocked, “You didn’t restock such an important item?”

Lan Sizhui replied bashfully, “We forgot. We never really use signals.”

Wei WuXian scolded, “Is this a matter you can afford to forget about? If Hanguang-Jun knew about this, he’s going to make you sorry.”

Lan Jingyi’s face went pale with terror, “It’s over. We’re gonna be punished to death by Hanguang-Jun this time…”

“Indeed, he should punish you! Without punishment, you wouldn’t remember the next time.”

All of the Lan juniors suddenly began to tremble and they had similar frightened expressions on their faces, just like Jingyi's. That time, Hanguang-Jun hadn’t punished them because he was too preoccupied trying to bring a certain person back to Gusu. Afterwards, he had to subdue the cursed hand and go on a hunt with Wei Wuxian which allowed the juniors to think that they had gotten an easy pass.

Turns out, life wasn’t so easy.

Wei Wuxian suddenly felt a little guilty for mentioning it as he only said it to scare them. But he couldn’t help but be amused seeing them pale under Hanguang-Jun’s light-colored eyes sweeping over them.

Chapter End Notes

sorry for the delay! i tried to reach the part of lwj finding out wwx was alive but realized that if i did it would take longer to update so here's half of the chapter for now. as an apology, i'll post the other half of this chapter earlier this week! (maybe wednesday), then continue with my sunday updates 🙏

next chapter:
wen ning and wangxian~

Arrogance IV-V

Chapter Notes

as promised, the early extra update!!

jingyi was certainly the fan favorite last chapter lmao i didn't know his suffering amused you all…🤣

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lan Sizhui bowed to Hanguang-Jun first, "This disciple apologizes for not preparing in advance. It was irresponsible of him." The others hurriedly followed his example, murmuring apologies as well.

Hanguang-Jun nodded. "Punishment will be decided after."

"Yes, Hanguang-Jun."

Lan Sizhui ran after him, "Young Master Mo, Young Master Mo! How did you know that it was not a spirit-consuming spirit or beast, but the goddess statue instead?"

"How did I know? I saw."

Lan Jingyi also caught up. They each ran on either side of him, "What did you see? We also saw lots of things on the mountain."

"You saw, so what happens next? What things were around the area of the ancient tombs?"

"What else could there be? There were only dead souls."

"Correct, there were dead souls. This is why it can't be a soul-consuming spirit or beast. It's simple—if it was either of these two, with so many dead spirits in the area, would it have chosen to not eat them? No, it wouldn't have."

Lan Sizhui and Lan Jingyi asked simultaneously, "Why?"

"I say…" Wei Wuxian sighed exasperatedly, "Why can't your Gusu Lan Sect teach less annoying, lengthy nonsense like cultivational etiquette, family trees, and history, and teach more practical things? How is this hard to understand?" He then went on to explain how dead souls are easier to absorb than living souls, as physical bodies are a barrier they'd have to go through.

Wei Wuxian laughed awkwardly when he heard his past-self pretty much trash talk the Gusu Lan teachings. He was so going to get it from Lan Qiren, he could feel it.

The Gusu Lan juniors, aside from Sizhui, all turned to Hanguang-Jun with eyes practically screaming that someone speaking like this about their clan deserved punishment too, right? It wasn't just them, right?!

"I'm sorry, Lan Zhan, it's just…" Wei Wuxian gestured to the situation on the screen but then Hanguang-Jun raised his hand and stilled his movements.

"No. Wei Ying is right. More practical lessons are needed."

Lan Qiren scoffed loudly while Lan Xichen softly snorted.

"Uncle, what do you think?" Lan Wangji continued.

Lan Qiren harrumphed, "You think I don't know that Wei Wuxian takes out our juniors every other night to teach them heaven knows what? You might as well make it official, rather than going behind my back like a bunch of thieves in the night. The audacity… " He shook his head, acting as if he still disapproved of it. Lan Xichen subtly coughed behind his sleeve, looking to be desperately keeping in his chuckles.

Meanwhile, the juniors looked thunderstruck. Where was the scolding?! Where was the punishment?! This— this was plain and simple favoritism!!

Lan Jingyi sighed ruefully, " *Ah* , to be born as Senior Wei… I could be exempted from Gusu Lan punishments too."

Hearing that, Wei Wuxian burst into laughter, "Oh, you— ha ha ha—have no idea how very *un* exempted I was in Gusu Lan punishments."

Lan Jingyi was astonished, "So that's how it works? It makes a lot of sense! Wait, so you're really not a lunatic?"

Lan Sizhui explained as he ran, "We all thought that, because the landslide and lightning led to the series of events, it must be a soul-consuming spirit."

Wei Wuxian spoke, "Wrong."

"What is wrong?"

"The order and the correlation is wrong. Let me ask you— for the landslide and the soul-consuming events, which ones were the first and second, the cause and effect?"

Lan Sizhui answered without thinking twice, "The landslide was the first, and the soul-consumption was the second. The first was the cause, and the latter was the effect."

Lan Sizhui ducked his head slightly when he heard how confident he sounded. It sounded so obvious now that he knew the answer.

Wei Wuxian spoke, "Completely wrong. The soul-consumption was first, and the landslide was second. The soul-consumption was the cause, and the landslide was the effect!" He

reminded them that the first person who got his soul sucked was trapped in the mountains for the whole night but got married a few days later.

Lan Jingyi asked, "Where is it wrong?"

"It is all wrong! Where would a good-for-nothing and penniless person obtain the money to form such a grand wedding?"

"Oh, I get it now!" That cultivator who had been trying to figure out the case suddenly snapped his fingers.

His martial brother asked, "What do you get?"

"That the sluggard made a wish to the goddess which caused the lightning on the coffins. Then he stole the burial items, getting rich overnight! This led to the unrest of the souls who began to haunt Dafan mountain. Then as payment, his soul was sucked after he got married. But I'm confused about A-Yan's story..." He stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"Wei Wuxian is already giving out the answer, why bother thinking about this?" His martial brother raised a brow with his arms crossed.

"It's all rather simply really," Brother Liu piped up, "You just need to think that all of the victims whose souls were sucked had all prayed in front of the goddess statue at least once. The prices to pay for their wishes were their souls."

This had the ignorant cultivator nodding, trying harder to piece the clues together.

The boys looked shocked. Wei Wuxian thought that it couldn't be helped, 'the Gusu Lan Sect was a sect that did not need to worry about matters of wealth after all.'

"Should we include trips to towns for more life experiences? I feel like our disciples are missing out on a few common sense to help them in their night hunts." Lan Xichen commented jokingly to his brother who seemed to seriously contemplate this idea.

Lan Jingyi and Lan Sizhui blushed. They hadn't meant to seem privileged. On the other hand, Wei Wuxian snickered at their expressions and rubbed their heads.

Wei Wuxian explained how the sluggard got rich by praying to the goddess.

Lan Sizhui asked, "Pray?"

"That's right. For example, he would pray for himself to be lucky, to become wealthy, to have enough money to marry, and so on. The goddess fulfilled his wish with the lightning that split open the grave, letting him see the treasures in the coffin. His prayers came true and, as the sacrifice, the goddess came to him on the evening of his marriage, and took his soul away!"

Lan Jingyi, "All of these are just your guesses, right?"

Wei Wuxian, "Yes, they are guesses. But, following this train of logic, all of the things that happened afterward could be explained."

“Senior Wei seems like a teacher right now.” A junior whispered to his friends.

They nodded and one of them said, “I wonder if he gives out lessons in Cloud Recesses?”

“Aww, I wanna be in that.”

“Me too!”

“Maybe I could ask my parents to let me study in Gusu for a year.”

Hearing this, Lan Xichen felt delighted and amused at Wei Wuxian’s influence with the children.

Lan Sizhui, “How can this explain what happened with the girl, A-Yan?”

Wei Wuxian helped guide the juniors to answer that question as he recounted to them what A-Yan probably wished for as a newly engaged woman and what it means.

Lan Jingyi shouted excitedly, “Oh, oh! So, so, so, the reason behind her husband being eaten by wolves the day after her engagement was that it was highly possible for A-Yan to have been to Goddess Temple to pray!”

Then Wei Wuxian asked the question, “So, when A-Yan got her soul taken and Blacksmith Zheng saw that his daughter had lost her soul, what was the only thing that he could do?”

This time, Lan Sizhui was quick to reply, “He could only entrust his hope to the Heavens. Therefore, he also went to Goddess Temple to pray, the wish being ‘I wish my daughter A-Yan’s soul can be found’!”

Lan Qiren stroked his bread and glanced at his sect’s disciples, “Looks like you two can reach the same conclusion after all. Then, why did you not think about this before? Did you need someone to spoon feed you the answers before you can go out night hunting.”

Feeling chagrined, Lan Jingyi and Lan Sizhui bowed in apology to him.

Wei Wuxian interjected happily, “Don’t worry, uncle! With me teaching them, they’ll become top-tier cultivators in no time, just like our Hanguang-Jun.”

Lan Qiren said nothing but his gaze spoke clearly how he thought about that.

Wei Wuxian spoke with appraise, “This is why only A-Yan’s soul came back, and also the reason behind Blacksmith Zheng losing his soul. However, although A-Yan’s soul was given back, it was still slightly fractured. After her soul returned, she had unconsciously started to imitate the goddess statue’s dance and even its smile.”

“Which is why Wei Wuxian’s inventions didn’t work because the equal exchange of wishing and soul sucking seemed moral and fair. It’s not considered evil but it definitely had gone down the wrong path.” Brother Liu provided for the ignorant cultivator and his martial brother who both nodded in understanding.

“Brother Liu is indeed smart! Just like Wei Wuxian.” The ignorant cultivator exclaimed, which caused his martial brother to slap him on the arm.

“Is that a compliment? How could you compare him to the Yiling Patriarch?”

But before the other could reply, Brother Liu said, “I don’t mind. It’s a known fact that Wei Wuxian is a genius, after all.”

The martial brother frowned while the ignorant cultivator grinned, nodding his head in agreement.

Lan Jingyi shouted loudly, “Wait! Just now in the temple, someone’s soul was also consumed, but we didn’t hear him make a wish!”

Wei Wuxian stopped, “Someone’s soul was consumed? Describe to me everything that happened earlier, without missing a single word.”

Lan Sizhui repeated the scenario both clearly and quickly. After listening, Wei Wuxian spoke, “How is this not wishing? It most definitely is! The soul-consuming goddess was right in front of them, already granting the wish. Then, it was time to seize the sacrifice!”

Jin Ling scowled when Jiang Cheng’s gaze turned on him, “I didn’t know the statue would do that, okay? If I did, I wouldn’t have made that… remark.”

Jiang Cheng clicked his tongue and threatened, “Maybe I should dump you in Cloud Recesses so you could learn how to think first before acting for once.”

Jin Lin had opened his mouth to retort, but then when he registered what his uncle was saying, his eyes widened. He glanced at Lan Sizhui and Lan Jingyi once before turning his eyes back on Jiang Cheng. He pursed his lips, “If you want me to, then I guess I have no choice.”

Not expecting that response, Jiang Cheng raised a brow. But a few seconds later, he rolled his eyes when he realized. This kid just wanted to hang out with the Gusu Lan disciples, didn’t he? Well… at least, he would make some friends.

But why did it always have to be from Gusu! Damnit!

Suddenly, the donkey ran toward the opposite direction and neighed. In front of them, there came a noise of chewing, complete with crunches and slurps. An immense figure was crawling in the bush, its huge head on the ground and moving using its stomach. Hearing the noise, it immediately lifted its head. Their eyes met. It was the face of a smiling woman, with blood dripping down the corners of its mouth, munching on an arm that had been torn off.

Several cultivators cringed at the gruesome sight. Good thing a cultivator’s belly was strong against blood and all sorts of grotesque images or else there would have been many people emptying their stomachs right now.

Lan Jingyi muttered in disbelief, “We cannot be this unlucky…”

Everyone ran, following the donkey.

Lan Sizhui was freaking out as he ran, "This isn't right! The Yiling Patriarch said before that high-level ones eat souls, and only low-level ones eat flesh!"

Wei Wuxian snapped, "Why are you blindly worshipping him? Even his own inventions were a mess! No rules stay the same in all situations. You can think of it as an infant—when it lacks teeth, it can only eat congee and soup, but when it grows up, it would naturally also want to eat meat using its teeth. Her powers had just risen greatly, so of course, she'd want to taste something new!"

The juniors laughed hearing Wei Wuxian diss himself. Only he would be shameless enough to do that.

Seeing this, an old Sect Leader scoffed, "At least he knows that people shouldn't be blindly worshiping him as the Yiling Patriarch. Looks like death did do him some good if he's now seeing the wrong of his ways."

His disciples nodded and one of them huffed, "Yeah, if he steps a toe out of line, then we won't be merciful. He should be thankful that we're giving him a second chance." This elicited more murmurs of agreement.

Wei Wuxian rolled his eyes and decided to turn a deaf ear, grinning instead at Lan Sizhui.

"A-Yuan, ah A-Yuan, now I understand your blind worship for me. Something in you just couldn't ever forget his Xian-gege." Wei Wuxian snickered, patting the blushing junior on the shoulder.

Lan Sizhui smiled. He wondered if he should tell him that it was because of Hanguang-Jun's private lessons that made him see the Yiling Patriarch in a different light than his other disciples.

The goddess stood up from the ground. Out of the blue, an arrow came with a whoosh and pierced her forehead, the arrowhead appearing out of the back of her head. Wei Wuxian looked toward its direction. Jin Ling stood atop a tall hill, and already had his second feathered arrow on the bow. He pulled to the maximum, and another head-penetrating arrow was released, the strength causing the soul-consuming goddess to stagger a few steps backward.

Jin Ling shouted to the Jin cultivators with him, "You guys block the goddess' way, I'll shoot her down with my arrows!"

"Yes, sir!"

Lan Sizhui yelled, "Young Master Jin, magical weapons don't work against her! Hurry and send off the signal on you!"

Jin Ling didn't listen and continued to shoot at the statue, even though she rushed at him with terrifying speed.

Jiang Cheng's face darkened the longer he watched and finally, he couldn't help but snap, "Jin Ling!"

Jin Ling had long since hid himself behind Lan Jingyi and Lan Sizhui, knowing his uncle's temper would explode again, and glared at him over their shoulders, "I was just trying to kill it like you wanted me to! You said you would break my legs if I didn't try my best!"

"You—!" Jiang Cheng gritted his teeth, knowing he did say those words, but he only meant them as encouragement, not to send him to his death!

Wei Wuxian slowly stepped in, "Jiang Cheng, even though I know it'll be excruciating for you, why not try a… softer approach with Jin Ling. I'm sure he'll listen to you more if you give him some praise." He smiled sweetly when his martial brother turned to him.

He grouched, clearly still angry, "As if you know how to raise a child. "

"Hey, didn't you see me lecture those kids just now. I'm a natural." Wei Wuxian patted his chest with pride.

Wei Wuxian thought, 'this situation isn't good! Both Jiang Cheng and Lan Wangji are at the bottom of the mountain, waiting for news. Who knows how long it would take them to realize that something was wrong and come up here?'

Hearing that Wei Wuxian needed him, Lan Wangji quietly said, "I should have been there," as a way of apology.

Wei Wuxian shook his head with a smile, "It's alright. Besides, if I didn't, you wouldn't have heard me play our song, and known it was me."

'One needs water to extinguish fire. If magical weapons don't work, let's try dark necromancy?'

Wei Wuxian unsheathed the sword on Lan Sizhui's waist and chopped off a piece of a thin bamboo, swiftly making it into a flute. He lifted it up in front of his lips and took a deep breath. The shrill timbre of the flute was like an arrow, slicing through the night sky and shooting into the clouds.

As he played, he knew he shouldn't be using this but he had no options left, 'whatever the flute sound calls, anything will work as long as its killing intent and power were strong enough to rip this soul-consuming goddess into pieces!'

Lan Sizhui was shocked to the point that he couldn't even move, while Lan Jingyi covered his ears, "Look at the situation we're in, what are you still playing the flute for? It sounds horrible!"

Lan Jingyi was getting ready to bow for the nth time today when Wei Wuxian stopped him with a hand on his shoulder, "Ah, ah, no need to bow for this, Jingyi. The bamboo flute I made really was horrible. I don't blame you." He patted the young teen's shoulder who

looked dubiously at Hanguang-Jun first as if he didn't believe Wei Wuxian. But when Hanguang-Jun remained silent, he breathed a sigh of relief.

As he was less than a few feet away from the goddess, Jin Ling thought, 'If I can't slice off her head with this blow, I will die here. Well if I die, so be it!'

Jiang Cheng's face went red and he roared, "Jin Ling!"

Jin Ling would like to say that he faced his uncle with a straight back and a dignified face but right now, his legs were slightly shaking and he was holding onto Lan Jingyi and Lan Sizhui's sleeves for support.

"You try saying that to my face right now and let's see if you'll still prefer death!" Jiang Cheng raged, scaring every junior nearest to him as they all backed away slowly. Mercifully, the Sect Leader stood in place and did not chase Jin Ling as they expected.

"Uncle, it's in the past. Just let it go! I promise not to be as reckless anymore." Jin Ling said, torn between disliking his uncle for embarrassing him and feeling happy that his uncle cared so much about him. Wei Wuxian was right about that.

Suddenly, a tinkling sound appeared. The goddess stopped dancing and stared into the darkness of the forest. Wei Wuxian put away his flute and thought, 'the thing I summoned seems to be a bit too powerful, doesn't it?' Then, the noise stopped and a figure emerged.

Everyone's voices were filled with terror as they shouted, "... The 'Ghost General', it's the 'Ghost General', it's Wen Ning!"

"And at that moment, everyone should have known you were Wei Wuxian." The woman from Meishan Yu sect said, rolling her eyes, "Are you stupid? You gave your disguise away!"

Wei Wuxian blinked. This was the first time that a cultivator not close to him, aside from the juniors, worried about his well-being. Or so it seemed. "Well, Madam, since it took Jin Guangyao exposing my identity, my disguise was still intact. It's actually thanks to Jiang Cheng here that I managed to stay as Mo Xuanyu as long as I could." He pointed his flute at Sect Leader Jiang with a grin.

"Nianzhen, don't argue with him." Jiang Cheng told the Meishan Yu cultivator who went by the name Yu Nianzhen, also known as Jiang Cheng's cousin.

Yu Nianzhen held her head high, "You're not the boss of me, Cheng Cheng."

Jiang Cheng cringed. "I told you not to call me that," he said through gritted teeth. But the woman just sniffed disdainfully and looked the other way as if she had no intention of giving her cousin face at all.

Wei Wuxian smothered a laugh. This woman was very interesting.

"Wen Ning? Hadn't he been turned to dust?" Wei Wuxian muttered, staring at the corpse. Wen Ning's face was pale and delicate, and looked handsome in a melancholy sort of way.

“Master Wei, y-you consider me handsome?” Wen Ning asked. If a corpse could blush, Wen Ning would be doing it now.

We Wuxian didn’t hold in his laughter this time and slung an arm around Wen Ning, “Of course you are, Wen Ning! Would I ever lie to you?” But as Wen Ning opened his mouth to reply, Wei Wuxian hastily said, “Don’t answer that.”

Suddenly, Wei Wuxian felt a tug on his sleeve. Realizing it was from Lan Zhan, he willingly walked back to his husband questioningly, but Lan Wangji said nothing and had his gaze back on the screen.

Wei Wuxian scratched his head with a pout, then shrugged.

Meanwhile, Lan Sizhui fought not to laugh over Hanguang-Jun drinking vinegar because of his uncle.

Hearing the others call Wen Ning’s name, Jin Ling’s blade turned toward another direction. His distraction led to the goddess picking him up.

“Let me go!” Jin Ling struggled.

Seeing this, Jiang Cheng held in the impulse to chase after that brat who was still hiding from him. His heart felt like it was about to drop seeing his nephew in such a near-death situation. Instead, he said aloud, “Don’t you dare get distracted while fighting again or the next time you do, I’ll really break your legs.”

Jin Ling muttered stubbornly behind the two Gusu Lan disciples, “It’s not like you didn’t get distracted when Jin Guangyao talked about Wei Wuxian while fighting you and you got injured for it.”

“What did you say?” Jiang Cheng snapped.

“I said, thank you for your great wisdom, uncle!”

Lan Jingyi snorted. He promptly got kicked on the shin, courtesy of Jin Ling.

When Wei Wuxian saw her opened mouth approaching Jin Ling, he raised the wooden flute again, hands slightly shaking, which made the notes that he played trembled. The sounds produced were coarse and unpleasant to the ear, but with two notes, Wen Ning started to move.

Noticing Wei Wuxian’s hand shaking, Jin Ling felt that warmth in his chest again. He was nothing but an arrogant brat the first time he met Wei Wuxian, even though he thought he was Mo Xuanyu then, but even so, Wei Wuxian risked exposing his identity to save him. Jin Ling bit his lip and cast a glance at the smiling Wei Wuxian in the cave.

Within the blink of an eye, Wen Ning appeared in front of the goddess and used the side of his palm to give her a blow. The neck cracked and Wen Ning gave another blow to cut off the hand holding Jin Ling. She turned her entire body around to face Wen Ning and Wei Wuxian took a deep breath and commanded Wen Ning to fight.

Wei Wuxian looked shocked as he thought, 'Wen Ning was the most powerful corpse that I had created before I died. He could even think on his own so he was the only one of his kind. But the current Wen Ning clearly lacks his own will!'

Lan Sizhui gasped and looked up at his uncle worriedly. Wen Ning tightly smiled when he noticed and patted A-Yuan's head.

"What in the world was Jin Guangyao doing with the Ghost General to make him lose his consciousness?" A cultivator pondered.

"Wouldn't that mean the Ghost General would go berserk?" Another said, sounding a bit frightened.

"Yeah, I heard that when they took in Wen Qing and Wen Ning to the Carp Tower, the Ghost General suddenly went crazy and killed a few people."

"Jin Guangyao must have done something to him so that he could lock him away and then when they showed us the ashes, how were we to know that it was both Wen Qing and Wen Ning's?"

"That sly bastard. He planned everything."

They continued to spat more insults about Lianfang-Zun while Lan Sizhui frowned, remembering the story of how his aunt Wen Qing died.

Wen Ning pounded the goddess statue to pieces. Amid the white pile of rocks, a marble-sized sphere rolled out. It was the core that contained the souls of ten-or-so living people which could help restore them back to life. However, nobody made any effort to pick it up as their blades which were aimed at the goddess all turned to Wen Ning.

One cultivator shouted at the top of his lungs, "Close in on him!"

Another said, "Fellow cultivators, we have to block him so that he doesn't escape. This is Wen Ning we're facing!"

"What are you scared of? It's not as if the Yiling Patriarch is here right now."

"Idiots. All of them." Yu Nianzhen brutally commented, causing the cultivators who were there to bow their heads in shame.

"If we kill him, from today on, we'll be famous!"

Lan Sizhui tried to stop them, "But he clearly saved us just a moment ago…"

Wen Ning gripped the neck of the person closest to him. With a light pull, he was lifted off the ground. Seeing the situation, Wei Wuxian knew that the melody was too aggressive and sudden, causing him to develop a killing intent, 'how about a calmer, quiet tune… calmer, quieter…'

The melody had drifted over his mind naturally. Hearing the sound, Wen Ning froze and slowly turned to Wei Wuxian. He thought, 'Wen Ning, it's me.' After a moment, Wen Ning released his hand, throwing the cultivator on the ground. He walked toward Wei Wuxian at a slow pace. Wei Wuxian retreated into the forest while playing the flute, guiding him to follow.

"Ah, it's this song!" A Gusu Lan disciple noticed.

"Yeah, it's the song Senior Wei always plays on his flute."

"I like it. I've always wondered who the composer is."

"You know, I noticed that whenever Senior Wei plays it, Hanguang-Jun somehow ends up appearing next to him."

"What kind of observation is that? Hanguang-Jun and Senior Wei are always together."

"That's true…"

Wei Wuxian sighed, leaning his head on Hanguang-Jun's shoulder as he watched himself unknowingly play the song Lan Zhan had made for them. Wangxian was so beautifully composed, he was almost tempted to play it right now.

Lan Wangji remembered this moment clearly. The playing was horrendous, the notes were off-pitch, but the melody was intact— the melody that only one other person had ever heard, and it had stilled Lan Wangji to the bone as his thoughts had whirled with: it couldn't be… Wei Ying was no longer… but who else would play this…

The Wei Wuxian on screen bumped into someone while he was retreating. With an abrupt pain on his wrist, the flute melody had stopped. Wei Wuxian turned around to look and his sight collided with Lan Wangji's eyes. 'Lan Wangji?! Oh no. Back then Lan Wangji had seen him use the flute to control corpses with his own eyes.'

Lan Wangji's eyes flashed. While Wei Wuxian had thought that he was in trouble, Lan Zhan had felt his entire world return to him as he looked into those unfamiliar eyes and saw *him*.

Lan Wangji used one hand to grip Wei Wuxian. Wen Ning stood still and slowly looked around as if he was searching for the flute melody that had suddenly disappeared. From far into the forest, the light of flames and sound of human voices were spreading. Wei Wuxian decided, 'Heh so what if Lan Wangji had seen me do this before? There were tens of thousands of people who knew how to play the flute, and the number of people who imitated the Yiling Patriarch's method of using it to control corpses could form a sect on their own. I'll just refuse to confess no matter what!'

While ignoring the hand, Wei Wuxian continued to play. This time, the tempo was faster as if it was urging, 'Wen Ning, go quickly, hide as soon as possible!' Suddenly, Lan Wangji's hand tightened, almost causing his wrist to break. Wei Wuxian's fingers loosened from the pain and the wooden flute dropped to the ground.

“I’m—” Lan Zhan was about to say but Wei Wuxian held a finger to his lips, his eyes already sparkling with forgiveness and love before Lan Wangji could even say a word. Instead, Lan Wangji raised Wei Wuxian’s hand, the one that he had unintentionally hurt, and kissed his wrist. Wei Wuxian blushed at the intimate act and looked away.

Lan Wangji was a bit ashamed. He had been so caught up in the moment that he hadn’t realized what he was doing. Just seeing Wei Wuxian again, having him back with him… Lan Wangji could not even begin to explain the wild surge of emotions that filled him as he stood there, trying to reason with himself that it wasn’t him, that he was misplacing his hopes again, but logic couldn’t explain why, when he touched that body and looked into his eyes, Lan Wangji could only see Wei Wuxian.

Wen Ning retreated quickly, disappearing into the dark forest without a sound. Wei Wuxian said, “Don’t chase after him!” and grabbed Lan Wangji. But, surprisingly, Lan Wangji never even looked at Wen Ning once, but stared at Wei Wuxian the whole time. The two stood face to face, gripping each other’s arms, and stared.

Wei Wuxian was amused at their images on screen and turned to his husband, “Lan Zhan, I’m curious… how did you feel when you knew it was me?”

Lan Wangji concisely summarized his feelings in one word, “Alive.”

Wei Wuxian’s eyes widened and they began to blink rapidly as his vision blurred with tears, “Oh Lan Zhan…” he murmured both sadly and lovingly, unable to resist hugging his husband in a tight embrace. Hanguang-Jun returned it without question, happy and content where he was, in Wei Wuxian’s arms.

Meanwhile, a junior couldn't help but comment, "Is it just me or does anyone else feel like we're intruding on something?"

He was reassured when many of them nodded, faces suspiciously red.

One awkwardly coughed, "Yeah."

"You're not the only one."

Chapter End Notes

this chapter was so long so i had to stop at wangxian or i’ll never be able to post lol

next chapter on sunday:
mad jiang cheng & let’s force wx to gusu!

not gonna lie, i laughed many times while writing this chapter. this has got to be my favorite one so far 😂👏🏻

Arrogance V

Chapter Notes

thank you so much for the response last chapter! sorry i couldn't reply to all the comments but know that i read every one and it made me so happy!

shorter chapter this update but i hope you all still enjoy it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jiang Cheng arrived. After hearing about how powerful and cruel the thing in Dafan Mountain was, he rushed up here again. He shouted, "A-Ling!"

Jin Ling saw him, "Uncle!"

Seeing that Jin Ling was safe, Jiang Cheng finally calmed down. Afterwards, he scolded him angrily.

Jin Ling looked as if he couldn't believe his ears, 'so uncle did care about me that day!' He shot shining eyes to Jiang Cheng who was oblivious to it.

Jin Ling said, "Weren't you the one who told me that I have to catch it? And if I don't, I shouldn't go see you?"

The juniors were amused when they heard Jin Ling's answer. It was almost the same thing he said just a few minutes ago to Sect Leader Jiang.

Jiang Cheng turned to the cultivators to ask what happened. His thoughts explained that among them who wore differently-coloured clothing, a bunch were the disguised disciples of the Yunmeng Jiang Sect, ordered by him to secretly assist Jin Ling, in case he couldn't overcome the challenge.

Jin Ling's jaw dropped. His uncle did what?! Face heating up in embarrassment after having everyone in the cave hear of his uncle's overprotectiveness, Jin Ling scowled and looked away, no longer wanting to face his uncle. He should have known that his uncle would still treat him like a child!

Jiang Cheng, meanwhile, was getting looks from cultivators around him, whispering to each other that the terrifying Sandu Shengshou was actually, in fact, a bit of a softie at heart. They all knew he spoiled his nephew greatly but didn't realize to what extent! No wonder that boy had such an arrogant personality, what with an uncle who babied his every step.

Jiang Cheng's fingers twitched to take Zidian out and shut these people up, but he remembered that his spiritual powers were gone, and the severe expression on his face

intensified.

Wei Wuxian shook his head at Jiang Cheng. He wasn't surprised that his martial brother would go through such lengths to make sure Jin Ling stayed safe. He was his only family left after all.

The cultivators told him that Wen Ning was back. Jiang Cheng spoke bitterly, "The thing was ground to dust in front of everyone long ago, so how can it come back?"

The disciple insisted it was Wen Ning, then pointed to the side, "... He was the one who summoned him!"

Everyone turned to Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji still locked in a stalemate. The corners of Jiang Cheng's lips pulled into a twisted smile. He spoke softly, "... Well, well. So you're back?"

A long whip appeared on his left hand, "Wei Wuxian!"

Jiang Cheng narrowed his eyes, inwardly sighing. He had done a lot of reflecting for the past few months about the revelations of what Wei Wuxian did, and what Jin Guangyao did, and he no longer felt that same burning hate and betrayal that had festered and stewed in him for the past thirteen years. In fact, he felt a small part of him curl up and cringe a little, watching his past-self's furious expressions and thinking, 'If only I'd known what you done, I wouldn't have been this vengeful when you returned.'

Before Wei Wuxian moved, Lan Wangji had already placed his guqin in front of him. The sound of the guqin collided with Zidian, starting a fierce battle between the two.

The cultivators, who hadn't been there on the mountain, eagerly watched in awe as they rarely had the chance to see two famous cultivators of prominent families combating directly with each other.

Feeling Jiang Cheng in a subdued mood, Wei Wuxian jokingly asked him, "What happened to not fighting against Lan Wangji without complete confidence in your success, hmm?"

Jiang Cheng glanced at him, before looking away with a huff. Although he didn't snap anything back, Wei Wuxian would count him looking at him as a tiny victory.

The rest of the cultivators quickly retreated a safe distance away, standing on the side and watching. "Wow! The Zidian whip is going against the Wangji guqin!"

"A fight between the most prominent cultivators really is magnificent!"

The cultivator, who had said these words, coughed awkwardly and looked away when his Sect Leader scowled at him.

Wei Wuxian frowned and tugged at Lan Wangji's sleeve, "Lan Zhan, don't you think a fight between us would be even more magnificent?"

"Mm."

Hearing this, the juniors were surprised. How could Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji ever fight against each other? Wei Wuxian didn't even fight with a sword.

On the other hand, Wei Wuxian waited for his chance, and suddenly sprinted off.

"You want to run? Hmph!" Jiang Cheng saw that he went outside of Lan Wangji's area of protection and took his chance. With a crack of his whip, Zidian slashed out on the center of his back! Wei Wuxian was flung onto the donkey with an, "Ah!" After the blow, both Lan Wangji and Jiang Cheng stopped, looking stunned.

Wei Wuxian leaned in to Lan Wangji, "So you also thought I was possessing someone, Lan Zhan?"

Lan Wangji gave a small nod, as if he was ashamed of thinking bad about Wei Wuxian, "Didn't have enough time to process."

Seeing his expression, Wei Wuxian stifled a laugh, and patted him on the arm, "Don't make that face, it's alright. Gege understands you. "

Wei Wuxian massaged the back side of his waist and hid behind the donkey, yelling angrily, "How amazing! You really can do anything when you're from a powerful clan, can't you? You can even beat up anyone you want! Tsk tsk tsk!"

Jiang Cheng snapped, "What the hell is going on?"

Wei Wuxian thought, 'Of course Zidian can't whip my soul out. I didn't possess anyone's body, but was forcibly given one!'

As Jiang Cheng prepared to whip again, Lan Jingyi suddenly shouted, "Sect Leader Jiang, this should be enough, right? It was Zidian!" This made Jiang Cheng, who cared about maintaining his reputation above anything else, unable to make another move.

Wei Wuxian moved to rub Lan Jingyi's head, grinning at him, "See? There are times when your smart mouth is pretty useful. Don't be ashamed of yourself!"

Lan Jingyi flushed and brightened under Wei Wuxian's encouragement.

He pointed at Wei Wuxian and scowled, "Just who in the world are you?!"

A meddlesome bystander explained to Sect Leader Jiang about Mo Xuanyu's backstory as a foreign disciple of Lanling Jin sect. He mentioned the low spiritual power and him being a cut-sleeve.

Wei Wuxian snorted, noticing the irony of it now. He was reincarnated to a body that loved men and here Wei Wuxian was, a few months later, in love and married to a man. Granted, it wasn't just any man but the handsome, refined and talented Hanguang-Jun, Lan Wangji, Lan Zhan!

"You know, I don't think I'm like other cut-sleeves." Wei Wuxian commented.

Jiang Cheng raised a brow, “Oh yeah? Then what’s Lan Wangji? Chopped bamboo?”

Wei Wuxian scowled at him, “I meant that if they’re not Hanguang-Jun, I don’t think I’d be attracted to other men.” Wei Wuxian looked around in emphasis as if he could spot someone more handsome and amazing than his Lan Zhan, ha!

However, his eyes were suddenly covered by someone’s hand and Wei Wuxian jolted in surprise, smelling the scent of sandalwood near him, “Lan Zhan?!”

“Don’t play around,” was all his husband said, dragging Wei Wuxian back to his side.

Jiang Cheng rolled his eyes at his brother-in-law drinking vinegar.

Sect Leader Jiang thought as he looked at this Mo Xuanyu, ‘According to his taste, he definitely wouldn’t choose to possess such a madman’s body…’

Meanwhile, Wei Wuxian was thinking, ‘I can’t believe that Mo Xuanyu being a cut-sleeve has saved me.’

A curious junior asked, “Senior Wei, so what kind of body would you have possessed if you were given the chance?”

Wei Wuxian blinked in surprise at the question but decided to take it seriously. He stroked his chin, “What kind of body? Well, first of all, it’s not good to possess someone, but for the sake of curiosity… hmmm… I guess… a body that Hanguang-Jun wants!”

Wei Wuxian nodded, satisfied with his answer. The junior seemed to go pink in the face at his response but nodded in understanding.

When he heard Wei Wuxian’s words, Lan Zhan’s ears burned red but he said nothing. The body that he secretly wanted the most was Wei Wuxian’s real body, of course. But, as long as Wei Ying’s soul was in it, Lan Zhan would love whatever body he was in either way.

Someone else muttered, “It’s not him no matter how you look at it… The flute was also played horribly… This is definitely a case of blind imitation, hearing how inferior it sounded.”

Wei Wuxian was offended, ‘… Why don’t you try playing a few notes after ten-or-so years of not practicing, using a lousy flute made with just a few slices and cuts? If it sounds pleasant, I’ll kneel in front of you!’

Many cultivators couldn’t help but laugh at this, though some of them tried to choke it down or muffle it. Why were the Yiling Patriarch's thoughts so funny?

Now that it seemed he wasn’t Wei Wuxian, Jiang Cheng thought, ‘this doesn’t mean anything. I should first find an excuse to take him back and use every possible method to get information out of him. It’s impossible for him to not confess anything or give himself away. I’ve done things like this in the past anyways.’

Wei Wuxian frowned and glanced at Jiang Cheng. One of the things he hadn’t liked hearing upon returning was Jiang Cheng torturing demonic cultivators like him. Had he really

forgotten all their brotherly affections and went out of his way to harm those barely in association with him? And even if Wei Wuxian knew he deserved his hatred, he couldn't help but feel this was way too over the top for Jiang Cheng.

Unless… he had other reasons other than revenge when taking these demonic cultivators as prisoners?

"Take him back." Jiang Cheng ordered and his disciples hurried to obey.

But Wei Wuxian jumped behind Lan Wangji, while holding a hand over his chest, "Ah! What are you going to do to me?"

Lan Wangji gave him a look.

Wei Wuxian snickered, "Lan Zhan, you're looking at me as if you disapproved of my loud behavior."

"Mm."

"Eh? Was I right?"

Jiang Cheng said dangerously, "Second Young Master Lan, are you purposely making it difficult for me?"

Lan Sizhui spoke, "Sect Leader Jiang, the evidence is clear— Mo XuanYu hasn't been possessed. If so, why should you want to trouble an unimportant person such as him?"

Jiang Cheng replied coldly, "Then why is Second Young Master Lan going to such great lengths to protect an unimportant person such as him?"

"Do you think maybe Hanguang-Jun was already in love with Wei Wuxian at this point?" One female cultivator observed.

"Impossible! That would mean Hanguang-Jun had feelings for him since thirteen years ago." Her friend replied, shaking her head.

"Then why is he protecting him?"

"Well, they could have been friends before and maybe their relationship developed after." She reasoned.

But the first female cultivator didn't look convinced, 'Friends, my ass. I don't stare at my friends that intensely when I find out they're alive. Also, how did Hanguang-Jun even know it was Wei Wuxian through that song anyway? Was Wei Wuxian the only other person who knows it?'

She contemplated some more as she continued watching.

Meanwhile, Wei Wuxian thought frantically, 'I need to find a way to get rid of both sides… Aha!'

He chuckled into his hand, "Sect Leader Jiang, um, you bothering me like this is making me feel very troubled. Thank you for being so enthusiastic, but your thoughts are quite off. Even if I'm attracted to men, I don't like just any type of man, much less follow anyone who waves at me. For example, I'm not interested in people like you."

Wei Wuxian knew that Jiang Cheng always hated being defeated while compared with others, no matter how pointless the comparison was. If anyone said that he wasn't as good as someone else, he'd be angered and not think about anything else until he won against the person. Jiang Cheng's face darkened, "Oh, really? Then, may I ask which type you're interested in?"

Yu Nianzhen clicked her tongue, "Cheng Cheng, when will you grow up and stop getting fooled by others so easily?"

Jiang Cheng clenched his jaw, "I was only fooled because Wei Wuxian knows me too well."

"No excuses!"

Wei Wuxian replied, "Which type? Well, I am very much attracted to people like Hanguang-Jun," and his thoughts explained that he knew Lan Wangji would not tolerate this sort of frivolous and foolish joke. If he felt disgusted, he would definitely draw a line between them and keep his distance.

But Lan Wangji's face was emotionless as he turned to him and grabbed his wrist, "Mark your words."

Wei Wuxian looked confused, "Hmm?"

Lan Wangji turned back, speaking in a mannerly yet resolute way, "I will take this person back to the Lan Sect."

As Wei Wuxian was being dragged away by Lan Wangji, he said, "...Huh?"

Wei Wuxian sighed at his past-self, smiling wryly at how everything changed now. "I feel like I had really set myself up."

Lan Jingyi and Lan Sizhui were surprised however.

"Wait, you weren't actually attracted to Hanguang-Jun?" Lan Jingyi questioned, sounding almost offended.

"I knew Senior Wei was just acting like a lunatic for his disguise but I never thought his clinginess to Hanguang-Jun was just an act too." Lan Sizhui commented, blinking at the two people that he always considered to be in love with each other.

Chapter End Notes

next chapter:
- wwx in gusu this time

see you next sunday~

Refinement I

Chapter Notes

how did this fic reach over 1000 kudos already??? omg O.O;;
thank you so much for all of the love and support!!!! ;w;
I hope you'll stick with me to the end of this fic <3

unedited. sorry for the errors it's 5 am SCREAMS

*edited 02/17/2020

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Ey, ey, don't look at me like that!" He wagged his finger at the juniors with their judging faces, "I'm already mad at myself for not leaping into Lan Zhan's arms the moment I saw him." Wei Wuxian sighed, shaking his head.

"The question is would he have caught you if you did while looking like that." Jiang Cheng quipped, eyeing Wei Wuxian's new body up and down.

Wei Wuxian whirled to Lan Wangji but before he could ask, Lan Wangji was already saying, "If you called out my name and smiled… maybe." His ears were red for some reason but Wei Wuxian laughed in delight and hugged his husband tight.

"Why are you acting so pleased as if 'maybe' is a good response?" Jiang Cheng couldn't help but comment, "That means if you didn't, he would have let your ass drop to the ground and ignore you."

"Jiang Cheng," Wei Wuxian turned to his martial brother while still wrapped in Lan Wangji's arms. He didn't see the glare Lan Wangji was throwing over his head as he spoke, "just because you're single doesn't mean you can trample on the love life of others."

"I'll make Lan Wangji single if you say one more word about my love life, Wei Wuxian." He snarled.

Yu Nianzhen delicately coughed into her fist, "You mean the lack thereof." She raised a brow when Jiang Cheng threw a scowl her way, "Was I wrong?"

Jiang Cheng looked as if he wanted to throw a tantrum so bad but because his dignity as a Sect Leader wouldn't allow it in front of so many cultivators, he only turned away from these annoying relatives of his and exhaled harshly.

Amused by the spectacle but glad that it was over, Lan Xichen finally said his piece, “There has been something bothering me as we continue watching this story in your perspective, Wuxian.”

Wei Wuxian tilted his head, already having an inkling as to what that might be, “Are you concerned about how long this will take?”

Lan Xichen nodded with a grave face, “If it’s going to reveal the truths you and Wangji have found in your journey to locate the missing parts of Nie Mingjue and expose Jin Guangyao, then I’m afraid we might be staying here for at most— a whole month.”

Every cultivator gasped upon hearing this, looking at each other with stricken faces.

“But we have no food!”

“And no water!”

“Our spiritual powers are gone so we can’t practice inedia either.”

Panic started to rise and Wei Wuxian furrowed his brows, wondering what this anonymous sender was planning by keeping them trapped here without food or water. They may be cultivators trying to achieve immortality but right now, they were all still human with bodily needs, especially with their spiritual powers gone. How could they learn the truth if they all started dying one by one in this cave?

“It is not as it seems.” The deep voice cut through the anxious chattering of the crowd and everyone turned to Lan Wangji.

He had his eyes closed and a hand over his abdomen, where his golden core spun. Wei Wuxian watched his husband with narrowed eyes for a moment, before they suddenly widened, and he shouted, “Ah!”

“What is it, Senior Wei?” Lan Sizhui asked.

“A-Yuan, try concentrating on your golden core.” Wei Wuxian told him in lieu of a direct answer.

Lan Sizhui looked confused but did as he was told. He held a hand over his stomach and a few curious juniors from behind also did the same.

“Now, do you feel your spiritual powers?” Wei Wuxian asked.

“But, Senior Wei, our spiritual powers are closed off—”

“Are they really?”

This question stunned Sizhui and a lot of people too who’d been listening in. They all started concentrating hard on their golden cores, trying to feel the spiritual power that they thought had been locked away from them.

Then, Jiang Cheng opened his eyes, brows furrowed and looking shocked, “It’s not gone… it’s—”

Lan Sizhui exclaimed in his excitement, “I feel it! It’s very faint, like it’s lying dormant under my skin but it’s definitely there. I just can’t use it.”

“That’s because it’s focusing its energy on keeping us sustained.” Wei Wuxian nodded, arms crossed over his chest, “So even if we stay here for a month, we won’t need food, water or sleep to keep us alive. It’s obvious that the one who put us here really just wanted us to focus on watching this screen and nothing else.”

“That… that kind of power…” A cultivator babbled in disbelief, his face pale and he wasn’t the only one. Many cultivators looked completely overwhelmed by this information and it wasn’t because they had to stay here for a month or that their spiritual powers were keeping them alive.

No. It was the terrifying power behind all of this. The ability to keep oneself sustained through spiritual powers alone was the height of cultivation. If they were able to master that while still being able to use their spiritual powers on their swords and talismans, they would basically become—

An Immortal.

One junior suddenly gasped, cutting through the tension in the cave, “No wonder why I haven’t been eating my pastries this entire time.”

His friend turned to him, “You still brought your pastries going up here?”

“Yeah, but there are only a few left.” The junior chuckled awkwardly, procuring the sweets from his sleeve. His friend shook his head in exasperation.

“Good cultivator, since you won’t be hungry anymore, could you let this gege have it?” Wei Wuxian asked, pointing to himself with a grin.

The junior looked surprised that Wei Wuxian was speaking to him and then with a shy nod, handed his bag of pastries to him. Wei Wuxian grinned, ruffling the boy’s hair before he stood and hid the pastries inside his robe.

As cultivators continued to debate and analyse on their spiritual powers, Wei Wuxian was contemplating about his and his own survival. He knew Lan Zhan was thinking the same as the man was looking at him with an intensity that usually would have made Wei Wuxian weak in the knees, but the evident worry in his eyes made him smile instead.

If cultivators had their golden cores with spiritual powers to keep them sustained, then what about him?

The sound of birds chirping suddenly echoed all around as the screen showed a man in black struggling in the hold of a man in white, “Wait, wait where are you taking me? Let go of me!”

“Not letting go.” Lan Wangji sounded resolute.

Wei Wuxian smiled at the funny picture they made, “Lan Zhan, you know you should be courting the one you love first before taking them to your house, right?” he teased.

Lan Wangji refused to say anything to do that. Probably because he didn’t want to be reminded that he should have married Wei Ying first too before “taking him to bed.” Although, he would argue that they had in fact just been missing the last bow to each other which meant they were half-married when they consummated.

“But I’m glad you didn’t let go, Lan Zhan.” Wei Wuxian said, tone soft as he slid his hand with Lan Zhan’s who squeezed his reassuringly in return.

Wei Wuxian tried to pull himself free but was unsuccessful, “... where exactly are we going?”

“Back to Cloud Recesses.”

The look on Wei Wuxian’s face made several of the juniors laugh. He clearly didn’t want to go back to Cloud Recesses, but look at him now.

The scene cut to show the Cloud Recesses in all of its serenity. The Gusu Lan disciples were shown working on their calligraphy in peace until it was suddenly shattered by a long wail, giving a few shudders down their backs.

Nearly everyone else in the cave jumped at the sudden loud cry.

“Was that a ghost?” Ouyang Zizhen asked, alarmed.

To his surprise (and slight fear), Lan Qiren answered gravely, his face dark, “Something much worse.”

Wei Wuxian was crying in front of the entrance, clinging onto his donkey. Lan Jingyi spoke, “Stop crying! You said that you liked Hanguang-Jun yourself, so what are you wailing for, now that he has taken you back?”

“I should have listened to you, Jingyi.” Wei Wuxian sighed as he nodded in agreement to the junior’s words. “Lan Zhan is clearly the best thing that has ever happened to me, I should be crying tears of joy!”

“You… should’ve…?” Lan Jingyi trailed off hesitantly, exchanging glances with Sizhui who only smiled in amusement.

As he was tugged up the mountain, he passed by the Wall of Discipline. When he found out that a thousand more rules had been added to the rock wall, he tried to run.

“Stop him!”

When he was caught, Wei Wuxian cried louder, “Gahhhh! I’m not going up, I’m not going up! If I go, I won’t be able to ever leave again! Gahhh!” His thoughts revealed that he had

studied in Gusu once before and he knew that security had most likely become stricter inside which would make it difficult for him to leave.

The juniors continued to laugh.

“Senior Wei is acting so much like a child throwing a tantrum.”

“He’s even worse than a child!”

“He’s really not like that scary Yiling Patriarch that they paint in our children stories.” Many of them nodded their heads in understanding, having grown up hearing those kinds of bedtime stories from their parents.

“By heavens, how did you suddenly marry into the sect when you hated it so much?” One cultivator asked, bewildered by Wei Wuxian’s behavior.

Before Wei Wuxian could proudly brag about the amazing Hanguang-Jun and how he would do anything for him, Ouyang Zizhen suddenly cut in, “By the power of love!”

They looked at the junior in surprise until he ducked his head down in embarrassment. Wei Wuxian chuckled, nodding, “What he said.”

Lan Jingyi said, “Alright! Stop being so noisy. Noise is prohibited in the Cloud Recesses.”

“I’m only being noisy because I don’t want to go in there — please give up on me!”

“Let him cry.” Lan Wangji said, standing in front of the entrance as he watched them with an indifferent look. “When he becomes tired, drag him inside.” Wei Wuxian hugged the donkey and cried even harder, bumping his head against it.

“How ruthless, Lan Zhan.” Wei Wuxian smirked, slightly tightening his hand in Lan Wangji’s, while Lan Zhan narrowed his golden eyes at him, clearly asking him to behave. But how could Wei Wuxian pass up the moment to tease his beloved husband? Standing on his tiptoes, he whispered, “Why don’t you show me exactly how much you don’t want me to leave after this is over, hmm Lan Er-gege?”

Although his facial expression did not shift in the slightest, the reddening of Lan Wangji’s ears satisfied Wei Wuxian enough.

‘How unfortunate! I thought being whipped once by Zidian would clear all of his doubts. Who knew that offhandedly giving Lan Wangji a repulsive remark would get me taken to Cloud Recesses. What was this all about? Is it possible that, after so many years, his level of cultivation has increased, but he has become more intolerant?’

Lan Xichen shook his head with a smile, “Intolerant he may be to others still, but to you, Wuxian, it is greatly the opposite, even thirteen years ago.”

Lan Wangji said a small, “Brother,” while Wei Wuxian bowed his head slightly and blushed, “I know now.”

Wei Wuxian continued crying as he said, "I'm attracted to men. With so many beautiful young men in your sect, I'm afraid that I won't be able to control myself."

The Gusu Lan sect disciples shivered. Even though they knew Wei Wuxian was just lying to get out, they shuddered at the thought of an actual pervert entering the Cloud Recesses.

Lan Sizhui tried to reason with him, "Young Master Mo, it was for your own sake that Hanguang-Jun brought you here. If you do not follow us, Sect Leader Jiang will not be willing to let the matter go. Over the years, there have been countless people whom he caught and took back to Lotus Pier, and none of those people were ever let out."

Jiang Cheng lowered his head and clenched his fist.

Wei Wuxian wanted to ask what happened to those people but he wasn't sure if he wanted to know the answer. Judging by Jiang Cheng's mood right now, it was best not to ask.

Lan Jingyi spoke, "That's right. Have you not seen Sect Leader Jiang's methods? They are quite cruel…" He paused and secretly glanced at Lan Wangji. Seeing that Hanguang-Jun didn't show any means to chastise him, he was bold enough to mumble, "It's all because of the twisted trend that the Yiling Patriarch started. There are so many people who copy him and cultivate that foolish method. With Sect Leader Jiang being so suspicious of everyone, is it even possible for him to catch all of them? Just look at you and your flute skills… Heh."

Lan Jingyi had closed his eyes when his past-self began gossipping about Sect Leader Jiang again and still had them closed when he listened to himself insulting Wei Wuxian's skills. He really wouldn't be surprised if his punishment at this point was to handstand around Cloud Recesses for life. He bowed to both Sect Leader Jiang and Senior Wei, "This disciple apologizes for disobeying Sect rules and insulting one's craft."

Jiang Cheng snorted and turned to Lan Wangji, "So Gusu Lan can produce disciples like him now since Hanguang-Jun is too biased to punish attitude like this, huh?"

Lan Jingyi wasn't sure what Sect Leader Jiang meant but it definitely got Lan Wangji angry. Wei Wuxian held a hand on his wrist though, while he looked at Jiang Cheng warningly.

Wei Wuxian frowned, trying to defend himself, "Well, actually, you might not believe me, but I usually play the flute quite well…" but before he could finish, a few white-clothed cultivators arrived. The juniors immediately bowed, "Clan Leader!"

Lan Wangji gave a nod of respect, "Elder brother."

Lan Xichen looked at Wei Wuxian and smiled, "Wangji never brings guests home. This is?" Wei Wuxian thought that the Twin Jades looked alike but their differences came in their personalities. Lan Xichen was gentle and benevolent, while Lan Wangji was overly aloof and stern.

"I'm happy you think I am gentle and benevolent, Wuxian." Lan Xichen said, and Wei Wuxian grinned, happy that his thoughts for once didn't make anyone angry.

Wei Wuxian let go of the donkey with a beaming smile on his face and approached him. 'He came at the perfect time, I just have to say a few words of nonsense and I'll definitely be chased off the mountain!'

However, when he just got ready to show his capabilities, Lan Wangji looked at him. Immediately, his lips were sealed close. 'Too shameless! He actually used the silencing spell on me!'

Wei Wuxian laughed now at his past-self's misery, "Lan Zhan, you know me so well!"

"Mm."

Lan Wangji continued his polite conversation with Lan Xichen, "Brother, are you going to visit Lianfang-Zun again?"

Lan Xichen nodded, "To negotiate about the next Discussion Conference at Jinlin Tower."

Lan Xichen sighed, knowing he was going to have to face seeing Jin Guangyao acting like the brother he thought he was in this. He just didn't know if his heart was ready for it.

Lan Xichen spoke, "Uncle has taken and examined what you brought back from Mo Village." He released the spell on Wei Wuxian and spoke to Lan Wangji, "It is not often that you bring somebody home, especially in such good spirits. You must treat your guest with more courtesy than this."

"I should have known only Wuxian would bring that sort of effect to my brother." Lan Xichen commented, chuckling at his advice to Wangji. Of course his brother would treat this guest with the most care and love than anyone else in the world.

Meanwhile, the juniors were staring at Hanguang-Jun's face on the screen, wondering when he exhibited any happy emotions.

'Good spirits?' Wei Wuxian carefully looked at Lan Wangji's face, 'Where did he see the good spirits?'

Surprised that they thought the same thing as Senior Wei, the young disciples exchanged glances before laughing.

After watching Lan Xichen leave, Lan Wangji spoke, "Drag him inside."

Lan Jingyi asked, taking hold of Wei Wuxian's arm, "Hanguang-Jun, where should we drag him to?"

Lan Wangji replied, "The jingshi."

"… The jingshi?!" The disciples yelped in surprise.

"What's the jingshi?" he asked, but the rest stared amongst themselves, afraid to make any sound.

Wei Wuxian couldn't help it. He really couldn't help but say it.

"Hanguang-Jun, you know what would have been the easiest way to bring me to your bedroom?" Wei Wuxian whispered to him lowly, gazing up at the handsome face of his husband, "Is if you tied my hands up and locked me in your room, or just shackled me to your bed even, so I could never leave and you could do with me whatever you—"

"Wei Ying." Lan Wangji hissed under his breath, holding Wei Wuxian's wrist tightly. Instead of grinning in triumph at getting under Lan Zhan's skin, Wei Wuxian gulped with a suddenly parched mouth as he stared into Lan Zhan's eyes, wishing desperately that they were alone right now.

But they were not, and not for a long time too, so Wei Wuxian turned his head away, and let the heat that had buzzed on the surface of his skin die down. He inwardly reprimanded himself to curb the urge to tease Lan Wangji in any sexual nature in the future.

Wei Wuxian was pushed into the room and he asked, "This is the jingshi?"

"This is Hanguang-Jun's study and bedroom. Normally no one is allowed to enter. Even the cleaning is done by Hanguang-Jun himself! Right now, Hanguang-Jun isn't here so don't you go messing up his things, you hear me?" Lan Jingyi stated sternly.

"No one is allowed to enter but Wei Wuxian is immediately invited inside," the same female cultivator nudged at her martial sister when she noticed this observation.

Her martial sister shrugged, "So what, Tang Tang? You only let close friends know your deepest secrets."

Wei Wuxian laughed awkwardly, "Uh… I'm really sorry about this… how about you guys just let me leave the mountain?"

"Hanguang-Jun is letting you stay, so you're staying. Don't think about sneaking off the mountain since you don't have the jade token of passage."

Wei Wuxian tried to escape from them one last time but Lan Jingyi and the other Gusu Lan disciples shoved him inside the jingshi and closed the door at his face. He sighed, thinking that he needed to see Wen Ning to clarify what's going on.

He suddenly sniffed the air, "... sandalwood? Lan Zhan has the same scent on his body."

Tang Tang raised her brows at her friend.

She retaliated by saying, "You smell like peaches." Tang Tang frowned at her, then discreetly smelled at her hands. Did she?

"Uh Lan Zhan, you might get in trouble for this." Wei Wuxian warned his husband in advance, squeezing his hand in apology.

Wei Wuxian knocked against a flooring that made a weird sound. After a few moments, he turned a piece of board up. Wei Wuxian was surprised that not only did Lan Wangji have a

secretive space in his room but he was hiding seven or eight black jars into a small, square cellar.

"Lan Wangji, he really has changed, hasn't he? He even started to hide liquor!" Wei Wuxian said in glee.

The juniors gasped, especially those from Gusu Lan. Their jaws dropped and they looked at Hanguang-Jun in surprise.

Lan Qiren was no different as he turned to his nephew, eyes wide, "Wangji?!" He never expected that over the years his nephew had become an alcoholic? But no one in the Lan family could even handle one sip. How could Wangji drink from eight jars of alcohol and still remain sane?

Then he saw the beaming look on Wei Wuxian's face as he laughed at something he said to Wangji, and finally… he understood.

As usual, it was all for him. He sighed deeply. Oh Wangji, just like his father.

Lan Xichen didn't seem surprised himself. Instead, he looked sad. The years without Wei Wuxian really took a toll on his brother so he didn't blame him to find the few comforts he could after his beloved's death.

Lan Wangji bowed to his uncle, "Wangji recognizes his wrongs and will accept any punishment from uncle." Wei Wuxian bowed as well, since he was part of the family too and wanted to bear any punishments with his husband.

Lan Qiren nodded, and said nothing more, stroking his beard.

Wei Wuxian loved Emperor's Smile the most and he remembered that he first met Lan Wangji after he tried to sneak them in past curfew. Currently, he finished one jar of Emperor's Smile already.

"Now that's a man who knows how to drink." A male cultivator, fond of drinking, complimented.

Tang Tang was looking incredulously at her friend now, saying, "By the heavens, he kept Emperor's Smile jars under his floor. How does that not scream 'I miss you so much, I wish you can be here to drink these jars with me'?"

Her friend pursed her lips, looking away, "I don't know why you're trying to convince me that they loved each other even back then. Maybe they did, maybe they didn't. I don't care. They're married now."

"So are you saying you're not the slightest bit curious as to how the esteemed Hanguang-Jun and the infamous Yiling Patriarch got together?" Tang Tang raised a brow to which her friend sighed in equal parts annoyance and resignation.

When he was just starting to get tipsy, a thought suddenly passed his mind..

“That’s right! I know where to find a token of passage!” Wei Wuxian clapped his hands and finished the last gulp in the jar. Since there were no places to throw it away, he filled the empty jars with clear water and sealed the lids again, stuffing them back inside and closing the wooden board. With this done, he ventured out to find the jade token.

“Karma loves me.” Wei Wuxian rolled his eyes, hating how he ended up getting the same jar filled with water out of the other six jars still filled with alcohol. He had really bad luck sometimes.

All of a sudden, he gasped, “Wait! Is the next part going to show Lan Zhan in the cold spring? I-I can’t let people see my husband naked!” Wei Wuxian grabbed the long strands of his bangs and pulled them in a panic.

Chapter End Notes

next chapter:

shameless wwx

shameless lwj too

(not yet the Past Flashbacks next chapter but good news - it's a chapter away!!!)

Refinement II

Chapter Notes

> i'm always blown away by the number of ppl who are enjoying this fic so thank you so much for the support!! ;w; all of your comments give me so much motivation to continue writing this every week~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lan Xichen turned to Wei Wuxian, “The cold springs?” His eyes darted to Wangji and then to the assemblage of people in the cave. He wasn’t exactly keen on letting everyone see his brother bare too, especially exposing the scars he bore for his loved one.

With a placating hand on Wei Wuxian’s shoulder, Lan Wangji said, “It is only a screen. They can see but not touch.”

Wei Wuxian jutted his lower lip out, “But Lan Zhan…” ‘These people might end up having licentious thoughts for my husband!’

“Nothing to do about it.” He said, sounding as if he didn’t care at all. Wei Wuxian bet he wouldn’t be as calm if the screen were to show *him* naked! Hmph! “Besides, didn’t Wei Ying leave quickly?” He was implying that Wei Wuxian hadn’t really gotten a good look of him before running away.

Then Wei Wuxian realized a more worrying matter, “That’s because I saw your…” He didn’t finish and instead placed a hand on Lan Wangji’s chest where the burn mark laid. Now everyone was going to know about the scars left behind on his husband's body, scars that were placed there because of Wei Wuxian. They not only reminded him how much Lan Wangji loved him but also how much he had hurt his husband before and after his death.

Since his return, Wei Wuxian never failed to kiss those scars lovingly whenever he could, most often during their lovemaking. But the sight of them still made his heart twinge with regret for ever making someone as perfect and pure as Lan Wangji go through so much struggle just for a person like him.

Noticing the furrow between Wei Wuxian’s brow, Lan Wangji smoothed it with a thumb, then reeled the smaller man closer to place a kiss on his forehead.

“Lan Zhan…” Wei Wuxian said, surprised.

There was a small smile on the man’s face as he cupped his husband’s cheek, “Wei Ying.”

The sound of his name said in the most loving tone from the man he loved the most made Wei Wuxian’s heart flutter like a swarm of butterflies had erupted in his chest. He smiled,

understanding his husband completely in that small, affectionate gesture.

The sweet, romantic mood only lasted for a moment until Lan Jingyi broke it with a shout.

“Oh heavens, it’s this one!” He turned away from the screen, face flushing. Noticing that the Gusu Lan disciples were still watching, he snapped, “Everyone turn around right now! You’re not allowed to see what happens next.” Startled by Jingyi’s command, the Gusu Lan disciples obeyed reluctantly while some of the other juniors were frightened into turning around as well.

Sizhui already had his back to the screen, not ready to see anything explicit between Senior Wei and Hanguang-Jun.

Wei Wuxian walked through the winding paths from memory, and soon found the cold spring, situated at a quiet and obscure place. Since the disciple on duty for watching over the cold spring was quite a distance away, Wei Wuxian managed to hide behind a rock and luckily found a set of white clothes on top of the white rocks. He grinned, thinking, ‘Entering the cold spring requires taking off one’s clothes. With the clothing already removed, would anyone really hold a jade token in his mouth? Let’s go stealing!’

“Maybe we should now.” Lan Xichen wryly smiled. He’d been planning to strengthen the security inside the sect ever since he found out that Jin Guangyao managed to sneak into the Lan Clan’s Forbidden Library which allowed him to find the way to kill Nie Mingjue.

He closed his eyes briefly and breathed. The thought of what *he* did was still too painful to process.

‘...Damn, it’s folded so neatly that I almost don’t have the heart to go through it!’ But Wei Wuxian still put his hand in and searched for the jade token of passage. He muttered, “Where is it… huh?” Suddenly, he heard the splash of water and he halted, gazing at the person in the spring.

“You know, Lan Zhan, I never got to ask.” Wei Wuxian turned to his husband, brow raised, “The cold spring is known for calming one’s heart and quenching one’s fire. So why were you there after depositing me in the jingshi? Could it be that you—!” He gasped, laughing internally. Of course, Lan Wangji wasn’t there to quench his fire since he’d only just—

“Mm.”

Wait, what? Wei Wuxian blinked at his husband, “Come again?”

His husband’s golden eyes seemed to pierce through him, “Had to calm myself or else I could… do something that showed Wei Ying my feelings.” After a pause, he continued, “It’s been many years.”

“... oh.” Wei Wuxian looked down, his own face flaming. Before, he would have thought that Lan Wangji meant something innocent like hugging him or kissing him. But after seeing the kind of dreams his husband had about him, his mind couldn’t help but supply a thought, ‘What if Hanguang-Jun hadn’t gone to the cold spring and instead went straight with Wei

Wuxian to the jingshi?' Wei Wuxian hummed and pondered how he could get that kind of dream into their incense burner to explore one night.

The person in the spring was quite tall. His skin was fair and his hair was black, wet and gathered to one side. The lines which outlined his waist and back were smooth, graceful yet holding strength. Wei Wuxian's immediate thought was, 'he's a beauty.'

Everyone knew by now that this was Lan Wangji in the cold spring, and while many cultivators were surprised to see the esteemed Hanguang-Jun in a state of undress, a majority of them, who were men, didn't mind as much.

The Gusu Lan juniors were still respectfully looking away, even the other younger disciples were doing the same since Lan Jingyi and Lan Sizhui's glare made them quake in their boots a little. They could still hear every word though and they blushed at Senior Wei's commentary about Hanguang-Jun.

On the other hand, several female cultivators and a few hidden cut-sleeves were internally squealing at the sight of the second most handsome cultivator's wet appearance. Their eyes were practically bright and glued to the screen.

The moment he heard their dreamy sighs and excited chattering, Wei Wuxian turned to them with a glare that could burn them on the spot.

"I don't know if I have to remind anyone, BUT HANGUANG-JUN IS A MARRIED MAN." Wei Wuxian shouted, standing in front of Lan Wangji as if he could shield his husband from their lecherous gazes. The funny thing was that Wei Wuxian only stood a couple of centimeters shorter, thanks to Mo Xuanyu's slighter figure so really, Lan Wangji wasn't hidden at all.

However, there was no mistaking the fond and whipped look on Wangji's face that only Xichen could see. He sighed in amusement.

But then the image of Lan Wangji zoomed in on his back where Wei Wuxian was shocked to find dozens of intersecting scars. 'Discipline whip scars! How does this person's back have so many discipline whip scars? Just only one or two strikes from the whip would already be a severe punishment. This person had over thirty strikes!!'

Seeing this, several of the women and the few men who were excited earlier gasped. They never thought that a person like Hanguang-Jun, who looked as if a single dirt could never touch him, would actually have so many scars on his body.

Meanwhile, many of the junior disciples from Gusu Lan didn't know this tidbit since their sect wasn't one for gossiping, so once they heard Wei Wuxian's thoughts, they stood there stunned. A few of them knew how painful discipline whip scars are based on some of the stories they've heard that were told to dissuade them from every committing such horrible crimes. Lan Jingyi grimaced in sympathy at the thought of getting struck more than thirty times by it. Those scars would never leave your body once you were hit once. To be struck thirty times.. just what kind of monstrous crime did Hanguang-Jun commit to get punished so severely?

On the other hand, Lan Sizhui seemed to be recalling past memories of running into the jingshi and snuggling beside a man who couldn't sleep on his back. He bit his lip and looked down with a sigh.

Lan Qiren's expression was as neutral as ever but if one looked deep into his eyes, there was a trace of regret and guilt. Lan Wangji was his nephew after all, but he had gone too far that day, fighting against all of his elders for a man who had become the enemy of the cultivation world. Yet a voice in his mind said, 'You still let your nephew marry him anyway.'

At the moment, the person in the spring turned around. Beneath his collarbone and near his heart, there was a clear brand.

This time, plenty of the cultivators exclaimed.

"The Wen brand! Why does Hanguang-Jun have it?"

"What is that?"

"Back in the Sunshot Campaign, some Wen dogs would carry branding irons to sear their marks on their enemies' skins."

"Ugh, despicable."

"Hanguang-Jun must not have escaped it during the war. I'm not surprised."

Jiang Cheng was surprised too but more on the fact that the scar on Hanguang-Jun's chest was placed in the exact same location as Wei Wuxian's before. He narrowed his eyes. How in the world did he get that?

The juniors were even more astonished to hear this. Hanguang-Jun had so many scars! Many of them were even tempted to turn their heads and see but Lan Jingyi made sure that none of these younger disciples could take a peek!

Wen Ning checked Lan Sizhui's expression in particular and found that his relative kept the same placid face as before. He didn't want A-Yuan to feel any responsibility against a sect that had caused their downfall.

As if sensing the juniors' moods, Wei Wuxian wagged a finger at them, "I hope you all don't think differently of Hanguang-Jun after knowing about these scars."

They immediately piped up in various choruses:

"Of course not!

"Never!"

"They make him cooler!"

Hearing that, Wei Wuxian grinned, "That's true. You should know, in a man's life—"

“—how can he not get a few wounds and earn a few scars?” Lan Wangji finished before he could. Wei Wuxian turned to him in surprise.

“Did I tell you that before, Lan Zhan?”

Lan Wangji nodded, “You also said once that your scar represented saving a maiden and because of it, she’ll never forget you for the rest of her life.”

“O-Oh, I said that too? Ha ha ha, Lan Zhan, I think it’s best to let the past stay—” Wei Wuxian was saying until he stopped when Lan Wangji held his hand and squeezed it.

“Mine are the same, but in a different way.” Lan Wangji said, gazing into his eyes, “To never forget Wei Ying for the rest of my life.”

Wei Wuxian’s eyes went wide. In fact, he already understood why Lan Wangji did it even without him having to say so, but hearing him say it like this made Wei Wuxian feel equal parts love and frustration for the man. ‘Damnit Lan Zhan! At least tell me these things when we’re alone and I could kiss you without shame.’ He settled for hugging Lan Wangji’s arm and squeezing it tight.

“Who’s there?” Lan Wangji said, snatching his robes and dressing himself quickly. In the same smooth motion, he unsheathed Bichen and struck at the rock, almost striking Wei Wuxian.

‘Oh no, it’s Lan Wangji!’

Lan Wangji sighed internally when Wei Wuxian didn’t get hurt by him.

Wei Wuxian had the time to pull off a leaf that stuck to his hair when he rushed out of the cold spring. He ran right into Lan Jingyi, Lan Sizhui and the others. Jingyi grabbed him and scolded, “What are you running around for? Running is prohibited in the Cloud Recesses!”

Wei Wuxian was ecstatic, ‘Here’s my chance! Now I can be kicked out of the mountain.’ He said at once, “I didn’t see! I didn’t see anything! I’m definitely not here to peep at Hanguang-Jun bathing!”

The juniors were shocked speechless.

Knowing that they could look after Wei Wuxian ran away, the younger disciples began to laugh, “Senior Wei is always fooling you guys.”

Lan Jingyi sighed tiredly, “Tell me about it.”

Lan Sizhui’s lips curved up, “I almost had a heart attack when I heard that.”

Lan Sizhui was frightened to the point that his voice even changed, “What? Hanguang-Jun? Hanguang-Jun is inside?!”

Lan Jingyi seized him furiously, “You damn cut-sleeve! I-i-is he someone you can peep at?!”

Wei Wuxian continued his act, "I didn't see a single peek at how Hanguang-Jun looks like without his clothes!"

Lan Jingyi fumed, "That is too specific for you to be innocent! Still saying that you did not, then what are you doing sneaking around here? Look at you— you have no face to see anyone!"

Wei Wuxian could no longer hold it in, and he laughed out loud, holding onto Lan Wangji for support. "Don't be mad at Jingyi's attitude, Lan Zhan. He was just trying to protect your honor."

"Mm." He nodded. Lan Jingyi held his chest in relief.

Lan Wangji continued, "There was no need to protect it in the first place."

Wei Wuxian paused, blinking. "You're right. It's a good thing it was me and not somebody else! Of course, only your future husband can take a peep." He grinned, saying it pointedly out loud to the people who might still have some ideas for Lan Wangji after seeing him shirtless.

Wei Wuxian covered his face with his hands, "Don't be so loud… Noise is prohibited in the Cloud Recesses."

Amid the ruckus, Lan Wangji walked out, looking presentable already. The juniors hurried to greet him. Lan Jingyi rushed to speak, "Hanguang-Jun, Mo Xuanyu is really outrageous. You only brought him back because he assisted us at Mo Village, yet he… he…"

Wei Wuxian thought, 'Kick me out, kick me out!'

Wei Wuxian made a 'pfft' sound at himself, "I was so desperate back then. Lan Wangji won't ever let you go, stupid!" He told his past-self on the screen.

Lan Wangji didn't even have to nod for the others to know it was true.

Lan Wangji only lightly glimpsed at him. After a moment of silence, he sheathed Bichen with a shing and spoke,"You are dismissed." Then Lan Wangji calmly held Wei Wuxian by the back of his collar and dragged him toward the jingshi. Wei Wuxian staggered, about to shout but Lan Wangji spoke coldly, "Those who make noise will be silenced."

In the past, the juniors of Gusu Lan were confused why Hanguang-Jun didn't do anything. Now, they had the inkling that maybe Hanguang-Jun didn't mind who was peeping because it was Wei Wuxian. They could only be relieved that nothing more had occured in the cold spring.

Lan Wangji carried him to the jingshi, walked straight toward the inner room, and threw him down onto the bed with a thump. Wei Wuxian yelped.

Tang Tang gasped at the sight of this. She hadn't been like the other girls who were salivating over Hanguang-Jun's appearance, although he did look very handsome. No, what she was most excited about was hearing Wei Wuxian's thoughts about it. She thought, 'it's so obvious

that they've been in love from the start even though Wei Wuxian sounds as if he's only attracted to Lan Wangji for now. But he will in time.'

Wei Wuxian reclined with a pout, 'Since when did the Lan Sect tolerate something as shameless as peeking at one of the Lan Clan's most distinguished cultivators bathing?!'

"Never." Lan Qiren deadpanned.

Lan Xichen spoke in defense of his brother-in-law, "Wuxian is only expressing his confusion, of course, since Wangji is… mmm very lenient towards him."

His uncle seemed to want to roll his eyes at that but felt too dignified to do so.

'What if I strike while the iron is hot and disgust him some more…' Wei Wuxian thought but as he raised his head, he saw that Lan Wangji was holding Bichen with one hand, looking down at him commandingly. He noticed that Lan Wangji's collars came slightly apart after he stripped down to his inner clothes, showing his distinct collarbones and the deep red brand under them.

He thought as he looked at it, 'When I hadn't become the Yiling Patriarch yet, I also had a sear like this on my body. No matter the position or shape, this is exactly the same as the one I used to have… but why?'

"Oh wow." Tang Tang said, digesting this information. "This seems important."

Her friend just sighed, "What's so important knowing about a brand mark?"

"To understand their love, of course." Tang Tang replied, gesturing. "It's interesting, don't judge me."

Wei Wuxian knew that Lan Wangji became famous at a young age. His thoughts explained how Lan Wangji was one of the most acknowledged cultivators in the cultivation world, and every word and action of his was set as examples of excellence by the elders of each sect for their disciples. So just what unforgivable mistake did he make for him to be punished like this?

Lan Wangji said, "Not a mistake."

Wei Wuxian pursed his lips and gripped his hand tightly.

Following his gaze, Lan Wangji lowered his eyes. He pulled his collar so that it covered his collarbones and mark, becoming the indifferent Hanguang-Jun once again. At the moment, the deep toll of the bell came from afar. "You will be sleeping here." Then he turned to another compartment of the jingshi, leaving Wei Wuxian alone.

Wei Wuxian frowned, thinking that Lan Wangji must have his suspicions of knowing it was him already. But even though their relationship wasn't exactly bad in the past, it wasn't that good either. It's possible that Lan Wangji's opinion of him was the same as everyone else's—being overly wanton and not virtuous enough. If Lan Wangji was sure that he was Wei Wuxian, they should have already been engaged in a large-scale fight.

Hearing Wei Wuxian's thoughts once more about him made Lan Wangji want to close his eyes. He'd wished he'd done better back then, to show Wei Wuxian that he could be trusted, that he had someone who could protect him and keep him safe. But back then, Lan Wangji hadn't known what the right thing to do was and was in a constant struggle with himself. It was only when he noticed Wei Wuxian was on the brink that he finally took action.

But by then, he was already too late.

'How strange! In the past, no matter what he did, Lan Wangji didn't tolerate anything, but now, even though he used whatever methods he had up his sleeve, Lan Wangji could still tolerate him.' After a while of staring at nothing, Wei Wuxian turned around and went off the bed. He lightly moved to the other chamber.

Lan Wangji was lying supine on the bed, appearing to be already asleep. Without making a sound, Wei Wuxian approached him. He thought, 'The token of passage is on him. Maybe I'll be able to find it?' However, just as he extended his hand, Lan Wangji's long lashes fluttered and he opened his eyes.

'He's not asleep!?' He thought in a panic, 'Oh well, might as well throw caution to the winds.' He threw himself onto the bed.

Instantly, several people gasped at the scene before them (Tang Tang's being one of the loudest).

Lan Jingyi, after a minute in shock, hurriedly barked at the disciples, "Okay, nothing to see here! Turn around." He didn't even finish before most of them were turning their bodies already, their faces in varying shades of red. Ouyang Zizhen was muttering to himself strangely.

Jin Ling covered his face and groaned, "I can't believe he's this shameless. I can't look at him anymore."

Lan Sizhui was just looking up at the cave ceiling, chuckling awkwardly as if nothing happened.

On the other hand, Lan Qiren looked as if he just swallowed a mouthful of blood. He finally couldn't hold himself back and spat out, "Wei Wuxian, have you no shame?!"

Wei Wuxian winced, knowing this was a long time coming, "Master Lan Qiren, you do know that I was just doing this to escape, right? I had no bad intentions for Lan Zhan at the time." Though it was a different story now if he did that same move to Lan Zhan on their bed.

"And yet out of all of the rules to break, you chose this… this…!" Lan Qiren couldn't even finish his words. His beard even looked to be shaking.

"If it makes you feel any better, we're a married couple now so no one's integrity is being damaged here," Wei Wuxian grinned cheekily and Lan Qiren had to finally be pulled away and consoled by Lan Xichen.

‘I remember that Lan Wangji hates physical contact with other people. Back then, if I touched him, I could be thrown into the air. Now, he’ll definitely kick me out, won’t he?!’ Wei Wuxian gleefully thought as he straddled Lan Wangji’s waist, his hands against the wooden bed, trapping Lan Wangji in between his arms. He gradually lowered his head.

Lan Wangji finally opened his mouth, “Get off.”

Wei Wuxian thickened his face, “No. If you allowed me to sleep here, you should have known that something like this would happen.”

Lan Wangji spoke, “Are you sure that this is what you want?”

Wei Wuxian paused, thinking, ‘For some reason, I feel like I should think twice before I answer this question… ‘

The juniors' faces grew redder hearing this. Jin Ling had his hands over his ears, wishing for death.

Meanwhile, Tang Tang was already furiously shaking her friend’s sleeve as the woman was also staring dumbly at the scene before her.

She hissed, “See! See! I told you. Oh heavens, look at them!”

“I’m looking… and I’m enlightened.” Her friend mumbled, eyes focused on the screen.

Suddenly, Lan Wangji tapped on Wei Wuxian’s waist and he fell weightlessly on top of Lan Wangji. ‘I can’t control my body!’ His head was at the right side of Lan Wangji chest and he couldn’t move at all.

Lan Wangji said, “Then stay like this for the whole night.”

Wei Wuxian’s face expressed his shock and confusion. Just what in the world happened to Lan Zhan in the past few years, turning him into a person like this? Was this the same Lan Zhan as before?! Shouldn’t he have been the person whose body was seized?!

Lan Xichen sighed. His brother really couldn’t help himself around Wei Wuxian, and he could tell that Wangji looked so satisfied having his beloved in his arms. It made him pity his brother here because Wuxian wasn’t doing it to please him but to get away. Though he couldn’t fault Wuxian either after hearing his thoughts.

He predicted that their dancing around was going to be an annoying but amusing drama to watch.

Lan Wangji slightly shifted. Wei Wuxian hopefully thought, ‘He finally can’t stand it any longer?!’ However, Lan Wangji simply waved his hand and the lights went out.

He commanded, “Sleep,” while raising the blankets over them and rested a hand on Wei Wuxian’s back. He closed his eyes with Wei Wuxian on his chest.

“I have to admit, Lan Zhan, that that was the best rest I had since my return.” Wei Wuxian grinned, leaning his head on Lan Wangji’s shoulder.

Lan Wangji didn’t say it but it was the same for him too. Having Wei Wuxian sleeping on him, feeling his heartbeat against his and knowing that he was alive, whole and safe in his arms, made Lan Wangji finally remember what a peaceful rest felt like.

Then an airy voice said, “If I’d known jumping into Hanguang-Jun’s bed would get me to marry him, I’d have done it sooner.” There was a titter as the girls around the woman who spoke agreed.

Wei Wuxian went stiff. He turned to look at the woman dressed in pink and narrowed his eyes, “What makes you think Hanguang-Jun would marry just anyone who jumps into his bed?”

He didn’t like how the woman was looking at him as if he were dirt under her shoe. With a fan over half her face, she raised an arrogant brow, “If you hadn’t infected him with your cut-sleeve disease, maybe he would have gone for a beautiful maiden instead.”

Wei Wuxian snorted, smirking at her, “And who’s the beautiful maiden? You? Bold of you to assume you’re worthy of being Hanguang-Jun’s partner.”

Her jaw clenched, finally getting irritated. She snapped her fan close, “You’re the last person on earth to be worthy of being Hanguang-Jun’s spouse. You’re nothing but a demonic cultivator who probably flirted with any man who took a fancy to you. Just a dirty little wh—mm! Mmm?”

“Eh!?” Wei Wuxian whirled to his husband, “Hanguang-Jun, you can still perform the Silencing Spell?”

Lan Wangji’s face was impassive but his eyes had turned a dark gold, eyeing the silenced woman unimpressively, “Can’t silence for long. Only an incense of time.”

Wei Wuxian laughed, “That’s still impressive, Lan Zhan!”

“Mm.” Then Lan Wangji wrapped an arm around Wei Wuxian’s waist, his hold possessive and turned their backs to the woman as if she was no longer important to deal with.

Realizing that she’d been silenced, the woman’s face grew red in anger and embarrassment.

One of her admirers pointed at Lan Wangji, “H-Hanguang-Jun, you can’t just abuse your powers like that!”

But the moment those cold eyes rested on him, he fell silent and cowered away in fear.

Several of the ladies realized then that Hanguang-Jun would not tolerate anyone, man or woman, who spoke ill of his spouse unless they wanted to deal with him. Whatever opinions they had, they'd just have to keep it to themselves.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter:
THE PAST FLASHBACKS BITCHES!!! get your Emperor’s Smiles and swords ready :D

p.s. since a lot of you have been asking: no, the extra chapters WILL NOT BE INCLUDED. Let’s leave wangxian some face pls XD;;;

update on chap 11: SORRY IM PUSHING THE UPDATE OF THE CHAPTER TOMORROW COS I'VE BEEN BUSY AND I DIDN'T WANT TO POST SOMETHING HALF-ASSED ;A;

Refinement III

Chapter Notes

> thank you so much to all the love last chapter!! It was overwhelming seeing you all excited for the flashback scenes which is why i'm sorry for the late update!! the chapter wouldn't come out the way I wanted it to, so i could only hope i did it justice ;w;
>
> i made sure to make this extra long for being late~
>
> unedited*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Suddenly, a picturesque view of the sky and trees in Cloud Recesses was shown, but then the clouds began to move backwards rapidly, the colors of the sky shifting from blue to grey to orange in quick succession. The leaves on the trees were swaying in the fast winds, their colors changing as well.

"What's going on?" A cultivator remarked.

"The clouds are moving so fast, I've never seen it like this before." One junior disciple gaped in awe at the fascinating scene.

Wei Wuxian narrowed his eyes, "Is it… time skipping?"

"You mean, a few events are being passed over?" Lan Xichen asked, trying to think as well.

Wei Wuxian frowned, "Maybe. But looking at how many times night and day went by, it's not just a few events. Lan Zhan and I took around two months to solve everything about Jin Guangyao. This shouldn't—" He stopped abruptly as a new scene emerged from the screen.

"Eh, who are they?" Lan Jingyi pointed out as he watched a group of teenagers walking in what looked to be Caiyi Town.

Jin Ling squinted his eyes, staring at the boy in purple robes who looked very, very familiar. In fact, the boy looked almost like him, "Is… Is that Uncle?!"

Lan Jingyi turned to him in surprise, "What?!" But when he got a good look at the teenager in purple, Jingyi's eyes widened and he squeaked, "That… that is Sect Leader Jiang. But he's… he's… "

"Like us." Jin Ling's eyes were wide too in disbelief.

“The one beside him, isn’t that Sect Leader Nie?” Lan Sizhui asked, looking from Nie Huaisang in the cave to the teenager with a fan on screen. The other disciples nodded, starting to realize what they were seeing in front of them.

Then Ouyang Zizhen asked, “But who’s the guy wearing black and red robes in the center?”

They all instantly turned to the one person they knew who wore the same color scheme on a daily basis.

One junior whispered to his friend, “But he doesn’t look like Senior Wei at all.”

Lan Jingyi interjected with a roll his eyes, “Of course not. He’s in Mo Xuanyu’s body now.”

Lan Sizhui’s eyes were bright as he said, “So the one were seeing is Senior Wei in his actual body!”

A female junior disciple couldn’t help but comment, her hands pressed together, “They all look so adorable in our age!”

Her martial sister beside her nodded, “I didn’t know Wei Wuxian actually looked like this. All of the paintings of him in our books always drew him ugly and horrible looking.”

“This is so weird…” Jin Ling muttered, still staring at his young uncle whose cheeks were still round with youth and eyes looking so much more innocent than now.

As the juniors were marveling over their senior’s young appearances, the rest of the cultivators were in a state of shock.

“This… this…” Sect Leader Yao sputtered, gazing back at his fellow cultivators in incredulity.

“H-How far back is this?” Sect Leader Ouyang asked one of his senior disciples, who could only stutter a vague number.

“Twenty years.” Lan Xichen answered, gazing at the screen with deep eyes.

They thought this device could only show them a couple of months back, which was a huge feat of sorcery in itself, but displaying an event two decades ago? It was just simply mind-blowing. No one expected this outcome at all, and none of them were prepared for the story about to unfold in front of them.

Wei Wuxian, with a leaf in his mouth, asked Nie Huaisang why he was sent to Gusu to study. Nie Huaisang smiled sheepishly and explained that his brother had heard of Lan Qiren bringing up many excellent disciples from the Lan sect. The other disciples with them mentioned that studying a year or two in Lan Qiren’s class would make anyone look at least proper.

Wei Wuxian turned to Jiang Cheng beside him, “Don’t I look proper enough right now?”

Jiang Cheng replied, “You’ll definitely be a mark of shame in his entire teaching career.”

Even Lan Qiren was too baffled by this turn of events to make a comment on that.

Meanwhile, there was a complicated look on Jiang Cheng's face, like a mix of pain, resentment and nostalgia, as he watched his and Wei Wuxian's younger counterparts interacting closely with one another. He didn't want to be reminded of a time when he and Wei Wuxian had been as close as brothers, when they would have done anything for each other. There was just too much to unpack between them now to get this close again.

Noticing Jin Ling constantly glancing at him, he scowled, "If you have something to say, A-Ling, just spit it out."

Jin Ling hesitated, before finally saying, "It's nothing, Uncle, it's just… you and Wei Wuxian seemed close."

'Close.' A word Jiang Cheng knew could not be associated with them now. He shot a look at Wei Wuxian and saw that the idiot was still staring at the screen, his mouth gaping slightly.

Lan Wangji had also been checking his husband, before he decided to snap Wei Wuxian out of his stupor. "Wei Ying."

Wei Wuxian seemed to jolt a little before he turned wide eyes to his husband, looking, a little lost and dazed. He then blinked and smiled at Lan Wangji, "Lan Zhan, look how young and innocent I was back then." He chuckled, reaching for his husband's hand and rubbing it.

He'd seen his old body before in their incense burner dreams so it shouldn't be a shock to see it now. But for some reason, he couldn't fathom the churning in his gut when he realized that this device was not only going to force them to watch the events after his reincarnation, but his past too. How much exactly was this thing going to reveal? Were there events that he didn't want to revisit be played out here? Would it change anything showing them to these people in the cave?

Wei Wuxian doubted it but he didn't let those emotions slip through. Lan Wangji was already looking at him with an adorably worried expression, so he said with his usual teasing tone, "Finally, I can see exactly when Lan Er-gege fell for me."

But Lan Wangji knew his husband well. He could tell something was troubling him which was most likely the thought of having his past exposed and scrutinized under all of these people. Yet, Wei Ying was still smiling and trying to appease Lan Wangji instead. Sighing, he held Wei Ying around the waist and drew him closer, wishing he could do something to make his husband feel better.

Nie Huaisang asked, "The Lotus Pier of the Jiang Clan is much more fun than here, right?"

"It depends on how you have fun. There definitely aren't as many rules there, and we don't have to wake up this early either." Wei Wuxian laughed.

One of the disciples asked, "When do you wake up? What do you do during the day?"

Jiang Cheng humphed, "Him? He wakes at nine in the morning and sleeps at one in the night. When he wakes up, he doesn't practice his sword or meditate; he goes boating, swims around, picks lotus seed pods, and hunts for pheasants."

Lan Sizhui smiled, "Senior Wei still wakes and sleeps at the same time."

"But his new hobby is teasing us juniors around," Lan Jingyi added with a grimace.

Wei Wuxian pointed out brightly, "No matter how many pheasants I hunt, I'm always number one."

Nie Huaisang spoke, "Next year, I'll go to Yunmeng to study! Nobody can stop me!"

But someone told him, "Nobody will stop you. It's just that your older brother will break your legs."

Nie Huaisang hid a bitter smile behind his fan. He'd give anything to still have his brother alive, threatening to break his legs all he wanted.

The youth drooped at once. Wei Wuxian spoke, "To be honest, Gusu is quite fun as well."

Everyone raised their brows and looked at Wei Wuxian's direction as if to say, 'we didn't forget how you screamed and wailed not to enter Gusu earlier.'

Wei Wuxian, feeling their stares, gestured to the screen with a shrug, "I was still an innocent little flower back then who knew nothing of its horrors."

Nie Huaisang patted Wei Wuxian on the shoulder, "Wei-xiong, here's a piece of sincere advice for you. The Cloud Recesses is nothing like Lotus Pier. During your time in Gusu, remember that there's one person whom you shouldn't provoke."

Wei Wuxian asked, "Who? Lan Qiren?"

Nie Huaisang replied, "Not that old man. The one you need to watch out for is his proudest disciple, named Lan Zhan."

Lan Qiren subtly coughed into his fist, his eyes darting sharply to Sect Leader Nie who immediately trembled and bowed, saying, "T-Those were just the words of a boy, Master Lan Qiren!"

Wei Wuxian spoke, "The Lan Zhan from the Twin Jades of Lan? Lan Wangji?"

"Your future husband," Wei Wuxian smirked.

Nie Huaisang spoke, "What other Lan Zhan is there? He's a model example of the legendary "other people's children" that parents tell you to look at. Heavens, he's the same age as you and I, but he has none of the energy of a youth. He's stiff and strict, even worse than his uncle."

Nie Huaisang was already bowing in apology to Lan Wangji, saying the same words he said to Lan Qiren.

Lan Zhan only nodded. He knew how he was back then and how that attitude of his ended up pushing the one he loved the most away. Although he was still much the same in his youth, he knew his behavior around Wei Wuxian was definitely more tolerable than it was in the past.

Wei Wuxian grinned, “Sect Leader Nie, you might just end up competing with our Jingyi here for the person who has to apologize the most.” He snickered.

“Hey!”

Wei Wuxian made the sound of an oh and asked, “Is he a boy who looks quite pretty?”

Jiang Cheng sneered, “Is there anyone who looks ugly in the Gusu Lan Sect? His sect doesn’t even accept disciples with unclean features. If you can, find me one who has an average face.”

Wei Wuxian emphasized, “Very pretty.” He pointed at his head, “White from top to bottom, wearing a forehead ribbon, and carrying a silver sword on his back. He looked rather handsome, but with his straight face, he looks like he’s at a funeral.”

“See that, Lan Zhan! My first impression of you was your handsome looks.” Wei Wuxian winked, leaning close to cup his husband’s face and stare at the beauty that was all his to admire.

Lan Zhan evenly held his gaze, letting Wei Wuxian look as he liked, while he did the same to him. Wei Wuxian was the most beautiful person in his eyes after all.

Nie Huaisang spoke assuredly, “That’s him!” After a pause, he said, “But he’s been doing secluded meditation for the past few days. You just came here yesterday; when did you have the chance to see him?

“Last night.”

“Last… last night?!” Jiang Cheng was stunned, “There’s a curfew in the Cloud Recesses. Where did you see him? Why didn’t I know about this?”

Wei Wuxian pointed, to the the top of a very tall wall, “Over there.”

The others looked speechless. Jiang Cheng clenched his teeth, “We just came and you got into trouble already! What happened?”

Lan Jingyi chuckled, “Hey, Jin Ling,” he whispered, “Sect Leader Jiang really reminds me of you when he scowls like that.”

Jin Ling, predictably, scowled, “You’ve got bad eyesight.” Even though Jingyi’s words were true. He just didn't want the other to think he was right.

Wei Wuxian replied with a grin, "There really isn't much. When we came, we passed that liquor shop called 'Emperor's Smile', right? Yesterday at night, I was tossing and turning, and couldn't stand it any longer, so I went down the mountain, into the city, and brought back two jars. Mind you, we don't have the chance to drink this in Yunmeng."

The scene began to change as Wei Wuxian's voice faded away to show the events of that night. Wei Wuxian had just climbed onto a roof into Cloud Recesses when he locked gazes with gold eyes looking back at him stonily.

"Oh heavens, it's teenager Lan Zhan!" Wei Wuxian squealed, clutching his husband's arm excitedly, "Look at you, Lan Zhan. You look so cute, so precious." He cooed.

Lan Zhan's ears turned red. Wei Ying continued to go on and on about his cuteness and Lan Wangji decided it was time to temper his husband a little.

"So elegant just like an immor — "

"Wei Ying is very cute too."

Wei Wuxian hiccuped on his next words. He suddenly forgot what he was about to say as he covered his burning face, not ready to hear Lan Wangji praise him as always.

Meanwhile, the Gusu Lan disciples were staring in awe at their respected Hanguang-Jun looking as young as them.

"Even at that age, Hanguang-Jun still looks so regal." Lan Jingyi shook his head in amazement, while Lan Sizhui nodded.

"He is so handsome." The same female cultivator sighed, "Imagine having a classmate like that while studying in Gusu."

"I think I'd die!" Her martial sister giggled, covering her mouth.

"But you wouldn't even be in the same room since Gusu doesn't allow men and women to study together." Ouyang Zizhen pointed out and sqeaked when both girls turned to him with a glare.

"Let a girl dream, Zizhen, *gods* ."

"If only there were boys in our generation like Hanguang-Jun." The martial sister said, sighing ruefully.

Ouyang Zizhen choked in disbelief, turning to his fellow brothers who also looked mildly offended. But what could they say when Hanguang-Jun was literally the model of a perfect cultivator?

"Those who return after curfew will not be allowed back in before seven in the morning." Lan Wangji said, "Take back the leg on the wall."

Lan Xichen chuckled at the sight of the youthful appearance of his younger brother, feeling a wave of nostalgia in his heart. ‘Ah, back when times weren’t so rough and you’d only just recently created your first friend. Or was he your first love already?’

Wei Wuxian tried to endear himself, “Come on, gege, go easy on me. One of my legs has already entered.”

He glared, “Take it back!”

Lan Jingyi and several other Gusu Lan disciples shivered, “Even at fifteen, Hanguang-Jun still looks scary when he catches you disobeying the rules.”

Lan Sizhui reminded him, “You know Hanguang-Jun would punish you less if you didn’t break the rules every few often?”

“Yeah, but… ” Lan Jingyi shrugged as if to say, ‘I can’t help being me.’

“Come on, why so inflexible?”

“What object are you holding in your hands?”

Wei Wuxian chuckled, “Hehe it’s Emperor Smiles! Hey, if I share a jar with you, can you pretend that you never saw me?”

Lan Wangji remembered looking at that smile and thinking to himself that it held the same charm as his mother’s. He had immediately banished the thought from his mind, even though after that encounter, Wei Wuxian’s radiant smile constantly appeared in his thoughts.

One Gusu Lan junior whispered to his fellow disciple, “Wei Wuxian trying to bribe Hanguang-Jun on their first meeting, he’s a brave man.”

The other nodded, an awed look on his face.

“Alcohol is forbidden in the Cloud Recesses. That’s a worse crime.”

“You don’t need to tell me that. Is there anything that isn’t forbidden in your sect?”

“Go read the Wall of Discipline in front of the mountain.”

“Ha. That stone has over 3000 densely packed rules carved into it, and they’re even written in seal script.” Wei Wuxian raised a flippant hand, “Who would actually go read that?”

Even though most of the juniors not of Gusu Lan agreed, they all unanimously sweatdropped. Oh no, Senior Wei was going to get it. Nobody questioned Gusu Lan’s Wall of Discipline unless you wanted to be punished by Hanguang-Jun.

Wei Wuxian continued, “Things like ‘killing livestock within the area is prohibited, fighting without permission is prohibited, promiscuity is prohibited, venturing at night is prohibited,’ are understandable. But there’re even ones like ‘sneering for no reason is prohibited, sitting

improperly is prohibited, eating more than three bowls is prohibited!" He looked incredulous, "All these rules and regulations… is there even any meaning to your lives?"

Lan Qiren's brow twitched, the throbbing vein on his forehead looked near exploding and Wei Wuxian shrunk away to the safety of his husband's arms.

Jiang Cheng facepalmed with a groan. 'That idiot…'

Lan Wangji scowled, "You — !"

Wei Wuxian cut in as he started fiddling one of the jars open, "Fine, fine. If alcohol is prohibited in the Cloud Recesses, then I won't go in. I'll drink it standing on the wall. That doesn't count as violating the rules, does it?" He then proceeded to drink.

Lan Jingyi laughed, "So is this why we have a 'no drinking on the roof' rule now?"

Wei Wuxian blinked, "Is there really a rule like that?" before he shrugged, smirking, "Oh well, that doesn't really matter to me," 'Since Lan Zhan lets me drink Emperor's Smiles anytime I want!'

"You dare!?" Lan Wangji drew his sword and came at Wei Wuxian who dodged and also pulled out his own sword, meeting Lan Wangji's blade fiercely. They fought with equal strength and in the scuffle, Lan Wangji managed to break the other jar from Wei Wuxian.

None of the juniors could speak, too busy gaping and gawking at the once in a lifetime scene in front of them. And they all exploded into chatter as one.

"The Yiling Patriarch and Hanguang-Jun fighting! They're actually fighting!?"

"Senior Wei is using a sword?"

"Holy shit, he's good! He can keep up with Hanguang-Jun!"

Wei Wuxian looked at these children in amusement and felt slightly embarrassed over the way they were praising his fifteen year-old self.

The senior cultivators, on the other hand, looked at this scene and thought to themselves that Wei Wuxian was indeed an unruly character in his past. Maybe there had been some truths when others said that Hanguang-Jun was an enemy of Wei Wuxian before.

Meanwhile, Tang Tang and her friend were gripping each other's hands, their eyes sparkling while watching the fight scene.

"Two handsome men fighting is so… attractive."

"Especially when you know they're going to end up together."

"Exactly."

"Oh my heavens, do you think it was love at first sight?"

"I-Is it?"

They fell silent, their gazes staring more raptly at the screen.

"You're gonna die, Wei-xiong! Lan Zhan has probably never been at such a loss before. He'll be watching you for sure. You should be careful. Although Lan Zhan doesn't go to classes with us, he's in charge of punishments in the Lan Sect!"

Wei Wuxian strolled with hands behind his head, "What's there to be scared of? Didn't everyone say that Lan Zhan had been a prodigy ever since he was very young? If he's so smart from such an early age, then he probably finished learning everything his uncle taught him and do secluded meditation all the time. How could he have time to come after me? I…"

Before his sentence was finished, as the group walked around a wall and saw Lan Wangji sitting in the room. He swept a cold look at them. They quietly entered the room, picked their seats, and avoided the desks around Lan Wangji.

Jiang Cheng patted Wei Wuxian's shoulder and whispered, "He's after you. Good luck."

Nie Huaisang also said, "Wei-xiong, take care."

The juniors couldn't help but chuckle, finding it amusing that these two people especially were comforting Wei Wuxian against Lan Wangji's wrath.

But several cultivators were surprised. They never knew that these well-known Sect Leaders had once been such close friends with Wei Wuxian before. Most of the Yiling Patriarch's past had been warped by rumors and exaggerations of his misdeeds, so the relationships in his youth were never really accounted for.

When Wei Wuxian turned his head, he could see the side of Lan Wangji's face. His lashes were long, appearing to be extremely delicate and elegant. His posture was also very upright, looking straight ahead. As he was just thinking about starting a conversation with him, Lan Qiren walked into the room.

Delicate and elegant? Tang Tang and her friend nodded at the same time, 'Definitely love at first sight.'

Lan Qiren was tall and thin, standing with a straight back. He entered with a scroll in one hand, and it rolled all over the ground as soon as he opened it. He started to talk about the rules of the Lan Sect and the faces of everyone in the room started to grow dark.

Even the ones in the cave, especially those who had been students under Lan Qiren, felt their brains start to shut down as if they were back in that classroom again.

As Wei Wuxian was bored, his gaze flew everywhere, and landed on Lan Wangji's profile, 'How can he listen so attentively to something so boring?'

Suddenly, Lan Qiren slammed the scroll onto the ground and smiled bitterly, "I am only repeating this one by one because nobody reads it, even though it was carved onto the rock wall. Hence, nobody will be able to violate them using ignorance as an excuse again. Even if

I do this, there are still people who do not pay attention. Very well, I will proceed to talk about something else."

Although his words could be applied to everyone in the room, Wei Wuxian's intuition told him that it was a warning directed at him. As he expected, Lan Qiren spoke, "Wei Ying."

Wei Wuxian answered, "Here."

Wei Wuxian pouted as he grumbled, "Just because I broke a few rules once, he targeted me right away."

Lan Xichen heard this and decided to tell Wei Wuxian a little tidbit. He was family now after all. He leaned in close to his brother-in-law and whispered, "I believe it may not be as simple as that, Wuxian."

"Zewu-Jun?"

"You see, your mother once shaved my uncle's beard when they were young. And I feel he may have held a grudge against her ever since."

Wei Wuxian's eyes sparkled, looking very much like he wanted to laugh, "Aiya, she did? Heavens, that's… Lan Zhan, did you hear that?" He asked Hanguang-Jun who nodded. He turned back to Lan Xichen, "Thanks for sharing it with me, Zewu-Jun!"

Lan Xichen inclined his head with a smile.

"Let me ask you. Are yao, demons, ghosts, and monsters the same things?"

Wei Wuxian smiled, "No."

"Why not? How are they differentiated?"

"Yao are formed from living, non-human beings; demons are formed from living humans; ghosts are formed from dead humans; monsters are formed from dead, non-human beings."

"'Yao' and 'monsters' are often confused. What is an example that distinguishes the two?"

"That's easy." Wei Wuxian pointed at the tree outside of the room and replied, "For example, a living tree was tainted with the energy of books, cultivated into a conscious being, and causes mischief, it would be a 'yao'. If I took an axe and cut it in the middle, so that only a dead tree-stump was left, and then it cultivates into a being, it would be a 'monster.'"

"Oh! So that's the difference." A junior whispered, grabbing a note from inside his sleeve to write down. Just in case he was asked when attending Lan Qiren's class again.

"What was the profession of the progenitor of the QinghеNie Sect?"

"A butcher."

"The heraldry of the Lanling Jin Sect is a white peony. Which type of white peony is it?"

“Sparks Amidst Snow.”

“Who was the first in the cultivation world to focus on the rise of his clan rather than his sect?”

“The progenitor of the Qishan Wen Sect, Wen Mao.”

Lan Jingyi leaned in close to Lan Sizhui, “Is it just or me is Master Lan Qiren purposely singling out Senior Wei?”

Lan Sizhui furrowed his brows, “I-I think so…”

A few of the juniors, as if they were in class, tried answering Lan Qiren’s questions too but Senior Wei’s responses were always so swift. One of them exclaimed, “Senior Wei is so smart!”

But another junior pointed to himself proudly, “I knew all of the answers too.”

His fellow martial brother didn't let him get a big ego for long, “Yeah right!”

Lan Qiren said that he expected the head disciple from Yunmeng Jiang sect to know all of that, “Let me ask you again—there is an executioner with parents, a wife, and children, but before he died, he executed more than one hundred people. He suddenly died in the public and, to punish him for his deeds, he was left on the streets for seven days. With the repressed energy of resentment, he started to haunt and kill. What should be done?”

The others looked restless and Lan Qiren scolded, “Why are you looking at him? Think about this as well. Don’t open your books!”

Nie Huaisang hunched his shoulders, getting nasty flashbacks of his classes with Master Lan Qiren. Thank goodness, he never had to take them anymore.

The disciples took their hands away from the books. After a few moments, Lan Qiren said, “Wangji, you can tell him what should be done.”

“Go, Lan Zhan! Show that Wei Ying who’s smarter.” Wei Wuxian cheered.

Lan Wangji looked amused and a little exasperated, “Wei Ying is smart.”

Wei Wuxian, to his credit, did not get flustered this time and instead sent a challenging smirk back to his husband, “Nuh uh, Lan Zhan is smarter.”

When Lan Wangji didn’t continue with a ‘Wei Ying is the smartest’, he became disgruntled and folded his arms over his chest, acting the part of a sulking child. But when he heard Lan Wangji release a puff of air, which was essentially a laugh in Lan Zhan’s books, Wei Wuxian forgot all about his pouting and became delighted that he made his husband laugh.

Suddenly, Nie Huaisang cleared his throat and even tapped his fan on the palm of his hand, grabbing everyone’s attention, “I-I have something to say, if you don’t mind.”

All eyes turned to the timid Sect Leader.

“Since we’re going to be here for awhile, why don’t we all get comfortable and… sit down?” He said, gesturing to all the empty space around them. They’d been standing around for nearly four hours now, and though Nie Huaisang knew their spiritual powers were keeping them sustained, he wanted to lie back and just let his body rest while watching this interesting storytelling of Wei Wuxian’s life.

When nobody immediately moved to do as he said, he laughed in mild embarrassment and decided to make the first move, “Then I’ll just do so myself.” Nie Huaisang suddenly dropped to the floor and sat primly like he wasn’t at all bothered that a Sect Leader shouldn’t be doing this. “Come on, you can sit down too.” He told his disciples who all exchanged glances before shrugging and sitting around him

Seeing one of the Four Great clans finally resting their feet, the other smaller clans took the initiative to do the same as well. Jiang Cheng only sat down when a majority of them did, his Yunmeng Jiang disciples following after him.

The Gusu Lan sect was the most hesitant about this, not wanting to ruin their pristine white robes on the dirty floor. However, they watched in surprise as Lan Wangji removed an extra inner cloth from his pouch and spread it out under him and Wei Ying, before he pulled his husband to sit together on it.

Inspired, the other Gusu Lan sect disciples did the same, with most of them sharing so that not all of them had to waste their inner clothing. Lan Xichen shared his with Lan Qiren who nodded.

Wei Wuxian grinned at Hanguang-Jun, “See? My husband *is* smart,” and was pleased to see the tiny smile on Lan Zhan’s face.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter:
- The Library Scene (eye emojis)

since some of you wanted to know how i’m going to handle the rated chapters in the novel, I HAVE A PLAN. you’ll see when we get to it XD

also i will be following the way the novel jumps back and forth between flashbacks bcos i like the way certain things were revealed lol

See you next Sunday~

Refinement IV-V

Chapter Summary

thank youuuuu to all the lovely comments last chapter 💋

hope you guys enjoy this one!!

unedited

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lan Wangji nodded to indicate respect and spoke in a monotonous voice, "First, liberate; second, suppress; third, eliminate." He went on to explain what each of those stages meant, while the other students let out a long breath. They thanked the Heavens that Lan Wangji was the one the old man selected. If it was any of them, they might have made a mistake.

"Hey, do you have a spare blank talisman?" A junior asked Lan Jingyi.

Lan Jingyi reached into his robes and handed him one, "Here. What do you — ?" He turned and saw several junior cultivators scribbling down notes onto their papers. He blinked in surprise, while the junior took the talisman from his lax grip.

"Thanks!"

Lan Sizhui chuckled, "Some of them weren't able to get into the Gusu Lan lectures so they're experiencing it through Senior Wei's memories."

Lan Qiren nodded with satisfaction, "Not a single mistake was made." With a pause, he spoke again, "No matter in terms of cultivation or as a person, one needs to be as solid as this. If one becomes complacent and proud just because they defeated a few simple mountain beings in their home and hold some empty reputations, one would definitely bring disgrace upon themselves, sooner or later."

Wei Wuxian raised his brows and took a look at the side of Lan Wangji's face. He thought, 'so, apparently this old man meant it for me. He called his best pupil to listen with us in order for me to watch.'

Lan Qiren humphed, while Wei Wuxian grinned and asked, "Am I correct, Master Lan Qiren?"

Of course he was right but Lan Qiren wasn't about to admit it.

He spoke, "I have a question."

Lan Qiren replied, "Speak."

"Although 'liberation' comes first, it is often impossible. 'To grant his dying wish' sounds simple—it would be easy, if the wish was a new piece of clothing, but what if the wish was to kill lots of people for revenge?"

Lan Wangji answered, "Hence, suppression assists liberation. If it is necessary, elimination would also follow."

Wei Wuxian smiled, "Such a waste. It wasn't that I didn't know the answer, I was only thinking of a fourth path."

Those who were taking notes perked up their ears, hands steady on their brushes.

Lan Qiren spoke, "I have never heard of any fourth paths."

Wei Wuxian spoke, "Because the executioner died in such a way, it is only natural that he turned into a fierce corpse. Since he executed more than one hundred people before he died, why not dig up the graves of these people, arouse their resentful energy, collect the one hundred heads, and use them to fight with the ferocious corpse…" The reactions of his classmates were shown especially an exasperated Jiang Cheng and a shocked Jin Zixuan.

Jin Ling froze. Although it was only for a few seconds, that man in the yellow robes looked so much like him. Was… Was that his —

"How could a child think of that?" A female cultivator said aghast to her seatmate.

"See, he's always thought of demonic cultivation before." One cultivator whispered to another, "The rumors of his past didn't lie about this one."

Their mumblings continued, while Wei Wuxian awkwardly rubbed the back of his head, grinning at Lan Wangji, "Ah, I forgot I said all of that before."

Lan Wangji finally turned around to look at him. His brows were knit, still expressionless. Lan Qiren slammed the desk and shouted, "How dare you!"

The Gusu Lan disciples leaned back in shock. They'd never seen Lan Qiren this incensed before.

Lan Qiren sprang to his feet and lectured Wei Wuxian sternly for reversing the natural order.

Wei Wuxian replied, "There are some things that can't be liberated no matter what, so why not make use of them? When Yu the Great tamed the flood, obstruction was the inferior method, and redirection was the superior. Suppression is the same as obstruction, so isn't it inferior…" Lan Qiren hurled a book toward him, but he flinched to the side and avoided it. His expression remained unchanged, and continued to talk nonsense, "Spiritual energy is energy; resentful energy is energy as well. Spiritual energy is stored in the dantian and its

power can split mountains and fill oceans, available for human use. So then, why can't resentful energy be used?"

Hearing those words again, Lan Qiren clicked his tongue. Maybe he should have eradicated such ideas firmer to the boy so that none of the mess later would have happened. Then, Wangji wouldn't have to suffer for this boy's ignorant and reckless decisions.

Another book came flying from Lan Qiren, as he spoke harshly, "Then, let me ask you again! How do you ensure that the resentful energy only listens to you and does not harm others?"

Wei Wuxian ducked while speaking, "I haven't thought of it yet!"

Lan Qiren raged, "If you thought of it, the cultivation world would not allow your existence! Get out!"

Wei Wuxian snorted. Lan Qiren was right about that. The world still wouldn't accept him even now as he was married to Hanguang-Jun and cooped up in Cloud Recesses.

A cultivator couldn't help but comment, "Not even Lan Qiren could beat those ideas from him as a child. What's the use of his lectures then?" He sounded as if he was blaming the old man for not having stopped the Yiling Patriarch from existing.

Lan Xichen frowned.

Wei Wuxian saluted with a cheerful, "Goodbye!" and quickly went out.

"If that had been me, they would have me do handstands for the whole day." Lan Jingyi whispered to Lan Sizhui.

He wandered about the Cloud Recesses for the morning, picking flowers and playing with grasses. After everyone finished the lesson, they finally found him on the roof of a tall wall. Wei Wuxian was sitting on the grey tiles of the ledge, holding a piece of grass in his mouth. His right hand was under his cheek, and sat with one leg propped up and the other hanging down, swaying slightly.

"I hate to admit it but," A female cultivator told her friend, "Wei Wuxian looked really attractive when he was young."

"Shh!" Her friend hushed her, looking side to side if anyone had heard her. Then she replied, "You can't just admit that openly."

"But I can't help it." She whined, more quietly now, "Just look at him. He's adorable."

Her friend surprised her when she nodded in agreement, "But maybe after his demonic cultivation, his appearance might change for the worse?"

"Oh no, you might be right." She pouted, thinking how much of a waste that would be.

The disciples below pointed at him, "Wei-xiong! How admirable of you! He told you to get out, and you really went outside! Hahahaha…"

“After you went out, a long while passed before he finally understood what happened. His face was so purple!”

“Xichen.” Lan Qiren asked without looking at his eldest nephew.

Lan Xichen smiled, “Yes, uncle?”

“Remind me again why I allowed Wei Wuxian to marry into the sect.”

Coughing subtly to hide his laugh, Lan Xichen replied, “Because he makes Wangji happy, uncle.”

Lan Qiren hummed and did not ask again. Lan Xichen considered his brother-in-law safe for now.

Wei Wuxian chewed on the grass and shouted below him, “He asks, and I answer. If he tells me to get out, then I’ll get out. What else does he want me to do?”

Nie Huaisang spoke, “Why does it seem like old man Lan is especially strict towards you? He always directs his scoldings at you.”

Wei Wuxian snickered. He knew now. ‘Oh mother, bless your soul, I really am your child.’ Lan Qiren’s attitude towards him probably didn’t improve when Wei Wuxian shaved off his beard too.

Jiang Cheng humphed, “It serves him right. What sort of answer is that? It’s fine if he spouts these nonsense at home, but he dared to say these in front of Lan Qiren. He’s seeking his own death!”

Wei Wuxian spoke, “No matter how I answered it, he wouldn’t like me, so I might as well just say what I wanted to say. Anyways, I didn’t try to offend him. I was just answering properly.”

“Arrogant kid.” One man sneered.

A few juniors shot him a look before turning back around to watch.

After thinking for a few moments, an expression of envy and yearning appeared on Nie Huaisang’s face, “To be honest, Wei-xiong’s words were quite interesting. Spiritual energy can only be obtained through cultivation and taking great pains to form a golden core. It would take I-don’t-know-how-many years to do, especially for someone like me, whose talent seems as if it was gnawed by a dog when I was in my mother’s womb. But, resentful energies are from fierce corpses. If they could easily be taken and used, it would be beyond wonderful.”

Suddenly, several eyes turned to Nie Huaisang who laughed it off, “What? Am I the only one who thinks controlling the undead is cool? Imagine having others fight your battles for you, that would be something.”

Several cultivators subtly rolled their eyes, knowing how weak in power the Sect Leader Nie was and was just being his cowardly self.

However, Wei Wuxian, Lan Wangji and Lan Xichen knew the implications in his words clearly.

“Sect Leader.” The Nie disciples whispered worriedly to Nie Huaisang as if they wished for him not to offend the other clans. But Nie Huaisang just shrugged with a tiny smile, fanning himself languidly.

Wei Wuxian also laughed, “I know, right? No harm comes from using it.”

Jiang Cheng warned, “That’s enough. It’s fine if you talk about it, but don’t actually walk such a crooked path.”

Wei Wuxian smiled, “Why would I leave the nice, broad road, and walk on a single-plank bridge on a dark, narrow river instead? If it really is that easy, people would have already walked on it. Don’t worry, he was just asking, and I was just answering. Hey, are you guys coming? Since it’s not curfew yet, hunt for pheasants with me.”

Sect Leader Yao huffed, throwing out his sleeves, “He said that before but look at him now. You really can’t trust those who go back on their words.”

Jiang Cheng’s brows furrowed in anger, not because of Wei Wuxian for once but from what Sect Leader Yao said. Not only that, he was angry at himself. Wei Wuxian had already told him years ago that he would never go down this path willingly, yet he never questioned why he changed cultivations years later.

Lan Wangji pulled Wei Wuxian closer to his side, even though the man was already leaning against him, and eating his pastry. Seeing Wei Ying like this again, happy and carefree without the entire world’s hate and prejudice weighing him down, reminded him once more why he wanted to protect his husband’s smile.

Jiang Cheng scolded, “What do you mean ‘hunt for pheasants’? Why would there be pheasants here?! First, go copy Righteousness. Lan Qiren asked me to tell you to copy the Virtue section of Righteousness three times, so that you can learn what natural law and morality is.”

Wei Wuxian spat out the grass in his mouth and dusted his boots, “Three times? I’d fly up to Heaven if I just copied them once. I’m not from the Lan Sect, and I don’t intend to marry into the Lan Clan, so why should I copy the sect rules of his sect? I’m not gonna copy.”

Several of the juniors snorted, and Wei Wuxian nearly choked on his pastry.

Thumping his chest, Wei Wuxian croaked, “Wow, how wrong was I, right Lan Zhan?”

With a glint of amusement in his eyes, Lan Wangji replied with a warm, “Mm.”

Nie Huaisang quickly spoke, “I’ll copy for you! I’ll copy for you!”

Lan Qiren narrowed his eyes. He knew he shouldn’t have passed that boy when he was younger, constantly slacking off on his own studies but willing to do other’s punishments for a price.

Wei Wuxian said, "No good person does favours for others out of the blue. Tell me, what do you want me to do?"

"It's like this. Wei-xiong, old man Lan has a bad habit. He…" Nie Huaisang suddenly paused and coughed drily, opening up his fan while shifting to the side. Wei Wuxian turned around and Lan Wangji was there, standing under a tree with his gaze in their direction. While carrying Bichen on his back, he looked like a jade tree, reflecting the shadows of leaves and sunlight. However, his stare was like a cavern made of ice. Everyone shut their mouths, but Wei Wuxian jumped down and gravitated toward him, "Wangji-xiong!"

Lan Wangji turned around and immediately walked away. Wei Wuxian cheerfully went after him and yelled, "Wangji-xiong, wait for me!"

Wei Wuxian laughed, almost landing himself on Lan Wangji's lap, "Look at you, Lan Zhan, running away from me!"

Lan Wangji sighed, holding up his husband properly. Seeing his past self like this now, he couldn't help but wish he'd been a little more direct with his feelings.

The white clothed figure flashed behind a tree and suddenly disappeared without a trace. Having only seen a view of his back, Wei Wuxian turned around and complained to the others, "He ignored me."

"Yeah," Nie Huaisang spoke, "It looks like he really hates you, Wei-xiong. Lan Wangji usually… No, he never does something so impolite."

Wei Wuxian pouted, "He hates me already? I just wanted to apologize to him."

Lan Wangji shook his head, "Not hate."

"Then what was it, Lan Zhan?" Wei Wuxian tilted his head, curious.

"Because of your smile." Lan Wangji slightly averted his gaze, "Made me feel things for the first time."

Endeared, Wei Wuxian cooed, "So you were in denial, Lan Zhan? So cute. I didn't know you liked me already since then." Which was kind of surreal to Wei Wuxian, now that he thought about it.

Lan Wangji simply caressed Wei Wuxian's waist, murmuring, "Wei Ying is the only one for me."

"Lan Zhan!"

Lan Wangji smiled.

Jiang Cheng sneered, "Apologizing now? Too late! Like his uncle, he surely thinks that you are evil and unruly to the core, and didn't bother to pay you any attention."

Yu Nianzhen raised a brow, “Cousin, is this all you ever do? Complain and nag around like some sissy old man. You’re only fifteen here for heaven’s sake. Have some fun.”

Jin Ling let out a ‘pffft’ sound before smothering it with a cough.

Glaring darkly at his nephew, Jiang Cheng countered with a scowl, “You try having a head disciple like Wei Wuxian and see if you don’t get insane after a week.”

She shot back, “I don’t have to, he’s not my responsibility.”

Wei Wuxian chuckled, “Who cares if he ignored me? Does he look pretty?” After a thought, he realized that Lan Wangji did look pretty.

Tang Tang whispered to her friend with a smirk, “Whipped.”

The scene changed to a new day and Wei Wuxian was tying his hair up as Jiang Cheng told him, “If you get up late again, I definitely won’t wait for you.”

“I was only just late. The worst it can get is to stand in the corner!” While Wei Wuxian spoke, the screen panned out to show a man in golden robes and carrying a familiar sword.

Jin Ling’s breath hitched. Both Jiang Cheng and Wei Wuxian turned to each other in alarm, before looking at their nephew.

Jiang Cheng noticed the man first and he saluted, “Young Master Jin Zixuan.” Wei Wuxian turned around to bow as well. The screen zoomed up close on a teenager with a vermillion mark on the center of his forehead and dressed in eye-catching Lanling Jin robes.

“It’s Jin Zixuan!”

“Wow, he’s really handsome.”

“So sad about what happened to him.”

Jin Ling heard none of these comments as he stared wide eyed at his father for the first time. Paintings hadn’t done his appearance justice. If Jin Ling thought he looked like his uncle, then he was particularly a carbon copy of Jin Zixuan. His eyes roamed every inch of him, trying to memorize every feature of his face and not even realizing that he had stood up and walked closer towards the screen.

“A-Ling.” Someone called out to him, and when Jin Ling was pulled back by the arm, he stopped. He looked over his shoulder and found Uncle with Wei Wuxian standing behind him, but their images were a little blurry.

That was when he noticed how wet his cheeks felt.

“Uncle, that was… that was…” Jin Ling sniffed, trying to brush off the tears with his sleeves but more kept replacing them.

“It’s your father.” Wei Wuxian said, gently patting Jin Ling’s head, “Come on, let’s sit and continue watching, hmm?”

Jin Ling nodded, complying easily as he was dragged back to sit beside his uncle. He felt a little overwhelmed at the moment, not expecting to see his father at all. He hadn’t connected the dots that watching Wei Wuxian’s past meant seeing his parents as well.

‘Oh god which means I’ll see my mother too?’ Jin Ling huddled closer to his uncle, heart beating in trepidation and anticipation.

“He’s becoming more and more presentable.” Wei Wuxian said.

Wei Wuxian winced, “Jin Ling, you’re going to have to understand that at this time, we weren’t exactly friends with your father.”

Jin Ling frowned, “Why?”

“Uh…” He scratched his cheek, “You’ll see.”

Jiang Cheng replied, “Jin Clan of Lanling Jin, as rich as the princes. He’s the heir of the Jin Clan. He has to be presentable.”

Wei Wuxian made a contemplative sound to which Jiang Cheng elbowed him, “Stop. Don’t get any bad ideas. I’m warning you. No matter what, Jin Zixuan is still my sister’s fiance. He’ll be family one day. You’ll have to bear with it.”

“Alright, I got it!” Wei Wuxian said while rubbing where he got hit. They walked towards the Orchid Room where they found Nie Huaisang.

Nie Huaisang suddenly came over and begged Wei Wuxian, “Please, Wei-xiong, if my grade is lower than yi, my brother will really break my legs! Stuff like telling apart direct lineage, collateral lineage, main clan, clan branches… For us disciples from big clans, we can’t even distinguish our relationships with our own relatives, calling everyone whose more than two tiers away from us aunts and uncles randomly. Does anyone have enough capacity in their brain to remember those of other clans?!”

Several juniors with long lineages nodded their heads in pity, but didn’t dare let it show on their faces.

But as a result of cheating notes flying everywhere in the air, Lan Wangji suddenly attacked during the test, and caught a few initiators of the commotion. Lan Qiren exploded with anger, “From now on, Wei Ying shall be reflecting upon his faults for one month!”

Lan Qiren turned to the Gusu Lan and guest disciples, “And none of you should follow in his conduct. Do I make myself clear?”

They immediately nodded, not wanting to see his ire in person.

Inside the Library Pavilion, Lan Wangji sat in a proper position, but, on the other side, Wei Wuxian had already copied Conduct for more than ten pages. Looking bored, he dropped his

brush to take a breather and looked across.

“Ah, Lan Zhan! It’s the second time we were alone together.” He grinned lewdly at his husband, implying certain things that only the two of them had seen in the incense burner.

Lan Wangji averted his gaze, a bit embarrassed that he had even dreamt of Wei Wuxian like that while they were teenagers. But at least Wei Ying didn’t seem to hate it; no, in fact, he remembered clearly how much Wei Ying had enjoyed watching his fantasy of them together.

Shifting his robes a little, Lan Wangji blinked once and continued watching.

Wei Wuxian thought, ‘The Second Young Master of Lan looks quite nice indeed. Yet, if only those girls can come and see him with their own eyes. He looks bitter as if everyone offended him or his parents had died; it wouldn’t matter how nice his face looks.’

“He is so hopeless.” Tang Tang shook her head, “Fei Fei, should we count how many times Wei Wuxian has complimented Hanguang-Jun's looks?”

“But we’ve missed so many already!” Fei Fei suggested. “How about every time Hanguang-Jun praises Wei Wuxian?”

Tang Tang raised a brow, “You think we’re actually going to hear any of that?”

They both wilted at the same time.

Lan Wangji was recopying ancient books, and his brushstrokes were slow and steady. Wei Wuxian couldn’t help but to compliment him sincerely, “Those are some great characters! They’re of the top level.”

Lan Wangji remained indifferent.

Feeling suffocated, he thought, ‘I have to sit in front of such a stuffy person for so many hours each day, for a month. Would I even survive?’

“You really wouldn’t entertain me at all, Wangji-xiong.” Wei Wuxian whined, rubbing his cheek against his husband’s shoulder.

Lan Wangji only told him, “Behave.” Which of course, made Wei Wuxian squirm more against him.

Wei Wuxian slightly tilted his body forward, and called, “Wangji-xiong.”

Lan Wangji remained motionless.

“Wangji.”

“Lan Wangji.”

Wei Wuxian shouted, “Lan Zhan!”

Lan Qiren was close to facepalming himself. Why oh why did he think Wangji could make Wei Wuxian behave? He had practically pushed his nephew to a pit he could not escape from!

Meanwhile, many juniors began to chuckle, and Jin Ling rolled his eyes, “He’s *so* annoying. How in the world did those two get married?”

“They say opposites attract.” Ouyang Zizhen replied with a smile.

Lan Jingyi snorted, “I’m more amazed that Senior Wei managed to live this long and not get skewered by Hanguang-Jun’s Bichen yet.”

Wei Wuxian nearly spat out the last of the pastry in his mouth, coughing a bit harshly as he forced himself to swallow. He took the water flask Lan Wangji gave him and gulped it down.

“Are you alright, Senior Wei?” Lan Sizhui asked with knitted brows.

“Perfectly fine, A-Yuan.” Wei Wuxian waved a hand at him as he tried to smother his chortles and not choke at the same time. Lan Wangji’s ears were looking suspiciously red.

Lan Wangji finally stopped writing, and looked up at him with a cold gaze. Wei Wuxian shifted backward, raising his hands as if he was defending himself, “Don’t look at me like this. I only called your birth name because you didn’t answer when I called you Wangji. If you’re upset, you can also call me back by my birth name.”

Lan Wangji spoke, “Put your leg down.”

Wei Wuxian was sitting with a slanted body and legs propped up. Listening to Lan Wangji’s words, he put his legs down, but his upper body inched unnoticeably closer, his arms pressed onto the desk. He asked in a serious tone, “Lan Zhan. Let me ask you a question. Do you… really hate me that much?”

Lan Wangji looked down, his lashes casting light shadows onto his jade-like cheeks. Wei Wuxian hurriedly added, “Hey, don’t be like this, ignoring me again after saying so few words. I want to admit my fault and apologize to you. Look at me.”

“Ah my heart was so hurt being ignored by such a beauty like Hanguang-Jun. Look at me trying to earnestly apologize to you.” Wei Wuxian pouted exaggeratedly with a dramatic gesture of his hand.

After a pause, he spoke again, “You don’t want to look at me? Sure, then. I’ll just start talking. It was my fault during that night. I was wrong. I shouldn’t have climbed the wall, I shouldn’t have drank alcohol, and I shouldn’t have fought with you. But, I swear! It wasn’t that I provoked you on purpose—I really didn’t look at the sect rules. The sect rules in the Jiang Sect are all told verbally; none of them are written down. Or else, I definitely wouldn’t have done that.”

But in his thoughts, ‘I definitely wouldn’t have finished the jar of Emperor’s Smile in front of you. I would have tucked it away and carried it back into my room, secretly drinking it every

day and sharing it with everyone until we all had enough.'

Wei Wuxian squawked, 'Thoughts! How could you betray me!'

"What did you say again, Wei Ying?" Lan Wangji turned to his husband whose face was red in embarrassment, not meeting his eyes.

Jiang Cheng huffed out a laugh, "I knew your apology couldn't be at all sincere."

"Says you," Wei Wuxian stuck his tongue out at him.

Wei Wuxian continued, "And, let's be reasonable— which of us attacked first? It was you. If you didn't attack, we could've communicated nicely and cleared everything up. However, if someone hits me, I'd have to hit them back. This isn't all my fault. Lan Zhan, are you listening? Look at me. Young Master Lan?" He snapped his fingers, "Second Brother Lan, why don't you do me a favor and look at me?"

"Senior Wei, are you sure you haven't developed a crush for Hanguang-Jun at this age already?" Lan Jingyi asked, looking at him doubtfully.

Ouyang Zizhen carefully analyzed the situation, "The desperation to have someone's attention on you screams 'I like you, please notice me.'" A few juniors and cultivators listening in nodded their heads, especially Tang Tang and Fei Fei.

Wei Wuxian scoffed, his eyes shining with amusement, "What are you two? Some sort of love experts now?"

"We see what we see, Senior Wei. The eyes can't lie."

Lan Wangji didn't even lift his eyes, "Copy it one more time."

Wei Wuxian's body immediately slanted, "Don't be like this. It's my fault, alright?"

Lan Wangji exposed his lie mercilessly, "You do not feel any remorse."

"This is why you can't lie to Hanguang-Jun, kids." Wei Wuxian wagged his finger at the juniors.

But all of them unanimously thought, 'only you are brave enough to lie to Hanguang-Jun, Senior Wei!'

Wei Wuxian spoke as if he didn't have any dignity, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I can repeat it however many times you want me to. I can even say it while kneeling down."

Wei Wuxian's lips twitched, "Oh, all the innuendos I could think of right now."

Jiang Cheng sneered in disgust, "Make sure to keep them to yourself."

Lan Wangji put his brush down. Wei Wuxian waited in anticipation but then soon discovered that his upper and lower lips were glued together.

His face quickly changed. He struggled to talk, "Mmph? Mmph mmph mmph!"

Laughter filled the cave as the juniors, and a few unwilling cultivators laughed. The scene was so light-hearted that for a moment, they forgot who they were watching and simply enjoyed watching the scene.

Lan Wangji closed his eyes and let out a faint breath of air. When he opened his eyes, the calm expression returned again. He picked up the brush again, as if nothing had happened. Wei Wuxian grabbed a piece of paper, wrote as if his brush was flying, and threw the paper over. Lan Wangji glanced at it. "Pathetic," he responded, crumpling it into a ball and tossing it away.

Wei Wuxian was so angry that he rolled around on the mat, climbed up, and wrote another one, slamming it in front of Lan Wangji. Again, it was crumpled into a ball and tossed away.

Lan Xichen chuckled, "Wuxian, this is supposed to be a punishment. Not a chance to speak to Wangji in private."

"Sorry, Brother Xichen," Wei Wuxian shrugged helplessly with a not-so-sorry grin.

The screen started showing a mirage of Wei Wuxian appearing in the Library Pavilion with Lan Wangji, getting silenced once more when he got too unruly, and trying to communicate to Lan Wangji on paper before they were all crumpled and tossed aside. The day always ended with Wei Wuxian reluctantly copying the books.

On the last day, Wei Wuxian brought his sword with him, loudly slamming it onto the desk. He began writing without a word, looking very obedient. Lan Wangji glanced at him several times.

Wei Wuxian snickered, "Not used to seeing me so obedient, huh Lan Zhan?"

Lan Wangji nodded, "Knew you were up to something."

"And yet, it still didn't prepare you for what's coming next!" Wei Wuxian grinned. He rarely got to see his husband looking scandalized nowadays so he was greatly anticipating teenager Lan Zhan's reaction.

Wei Wuxian repeated his past conduct and gave Lan Wangji a piece of paper for him to see. Lan Wangji was surprised to find the drawing of a person, sitting upright and reading by the window, with a vividly realistic expression on his face. It was himself.

Lan Sizhui's eyes widened, recognizing that painting as he had seen it kept perfectly preserved in Lan Wangji's belongings in the Jingshi. It had surprised him to see it since Hanguang-Jun wasn't a vain man, but now he understood. Of course, he would keep a painting of himself only because it was drawn by Wei Wuxian.

Seeing that he didn't avert his gaze at once, Wei Wuxian curled his lips, and raised an eyebrow with a wink.

Lan Wangji slowly spoke, "You spend your spare time, scribbling instead of copying the text. In my opinion, the day of your release from this punishment will never come."

Wei Wuxian blew on the ink and spoke nonchalantly, "I already finished copying, so I won't be coming tomorrow!"

Lan Wangji's slender fingers seemed to have paused before flipping over the next yellow-tinted page. Wei Wuxian lightly threw the drawing, "It's yours."

Tang Tang sighed, "If someone like Wei Wuxian offered me a painting of myself, I would have swooned and fallen in love so hard. No wonder Hanguang-Jun married him."

A female cultivator close to where she sat, turned around in shock, "Did you forget who Wei Wuxian is?"

"Uh yeah," Tang Tang said as if she thought the other woman was dumb, "Hanguang-Jun's husband." She smiled when the woman looked away in disdain, no longer speaking to her.

Fei Fei just shook her head beside her friend. They'd all be converted soon enough.

The drawing was thrown onto the mat, but Lan Wangji didn't have any intention of picking it up. Wei Wuxian suddenly added, "I forgot. I need to add something else." He picked up the paper and his brush, and added a few strokes. He glanced at the drawing, then, the actual person, and fell toward the ground in laughter. Lan Wangji put down the book, and saw that Wei Wuxian added a flower onto the drawing, where the side of his head was.

The corners of his lip seemed to have twitched. Wei Wuxian crawled up and spoke before him, "'Pathetic', right? I just know that you're gonna say pathetic. Can't you switch to something else? Or add another word to it?"

Lan Wangji replied coldly, "Extremely pathetic."

"Was my drawing of you that ugly, Lan Zhan?" Wei Wuxian's eyes grew big, tugging at Lan Zhan's sleeve pitifully to fish for compliments.

A small smile was playing on Lan Wangji's face, "It was beautiful, Wei Ying. Thank you."

Wei Wuxian grinned, "No need for thanks between us, remember?"

Wei Wuxian clapped his hands, "So you really added another word to it. Thank you!"

Lan Wangji turned his gaze away, picked up the book which he put on the desk, and opened it again. He only took one look at before he hurled the book away, as if he was burnt by fire.

The juniors jolted, wondering what made Hanguang-Jun look so shocked.

Wei Ying was already trembling, trying to hold in his laughter.

The screen zoomed in on the open book which presented naked, intertwining bodies.

The Gusu Lan disciples gasped and hastily looked away, their faces burning red at seeing such a lewd image for the first time. The rest of the juniors were doing the same, but many of them were less disciplined and were peeking between their fingers.

Lan Jingyi was fighting back the urge to laugh as he tried to be affronted for Hanguang-Jun's sake, "I can't believe you did that, Senior Wei!"

Wei Wuxian was laughing outright now, enjoying the sight of Lan Zhan's face twisting into shock and horror. "But Lan Zhan's reaction was worth it!"

Lan Sizhui could only think in exasperation, 'Why did Senior Wei taught me this skill?'

Wen Ning suddenly told Lan Sizhui, "A-Yuan, I think you might get punished if you try this trick Master Wei taught you."

Lan Jingyi whipped his head towards Lan Sizhui who was trying to get his uncle to keep quiet, "You know how Senior Wei did that?"

Lan Sizhui sweatdropped when all of the juniors' eyes turned to him. Some of them even looked interested to know how, "H-Hey, it's not something I'm ever going to do, alright?"

Meanwhile, Lan Qiren really palmed his forehead, apologizing to his nephew of the past for subjecting him to this torment.

Wei Wuxian slapped the table as he laughed hysterically,
"Hahahahahahahahahahahahahaha!"

As the book was thrown to the ground, Lan Wangji fell back to the corner of the Library Pavilion in less than a second. He roared with rage, "Wei Ying——!"

"Here!" Wei Wuxian shouted joyfully, clutching at his husband beside him.

One of the cultivators of Nanhu Liu clan said, "So the Yiling Patriarch was pulling pranks as a teenager just like the rest of us. He doesn't seem so bad?"

Someone from another sect hissed, "Of course, he seems only innocent now but once he delves into demonic cultivation… you'll see." He was one of the few whose parents died from fighting against the Yiling Patriarch and he would never forget it.

Wei Wuxian almost rolled under the desk from laughter, raising a hand with much difficulty,
"Here! I'm here!"

Lan Wangji swiftly drew his sword, Bichen. Wei Wuxian hastily grabbed his own sword, and reminded Lan Wangji, "Manners! Second Master Lan! Watch your manners! I brought my sword today as well. If we start fighting, would your Library Pavilion be fine?"

Lan Xichen knew that his brother's temper was never easily riled up so seeing him like this made him a little surprised. Yet again, only Wei Wuxian could bring out this sort of side of

Wangji.

The blade of Lan Wangji's sword pointed at him, "What sort of person are you?!"

Wei Wuxian responded, "What sort of person could I be? A man!"

Lan Wangji lashed out "You have no shame!"

"Do I need to be ashamed about this? Don't tell me you've never seen something like this before? I don't believe you."

To imply that Hanguang-Jun had ever looked at something like porn made many disciples fear for Wei Wuxian's life, even though he was right there, happily watching the show with them.

Wei Wuxian smirked, knowing that his husband had definitely looked at some of those books afterwards, or how else did Lan Wangji know what to do with him during sex?

Lan Wangji pointed his sword at Wei Wuxian. He spoke with a frigid face, "Get out. We will fight."

The Gusu Lan sect disciples had never seen Hanguang-Jun lose his composure like this before, and it was honestly frightening.

Wei Wuxian shook his head a couple of times, pretending to be docile, "No, no. Didn't you know, Young Master Lan? Fighting without permission is prohibited in the Cloud Recesses." He proceeded to pick up the book, but Lan Wangji snatched it in his hand.

He spoke, "Why are you grabbing it? I thought that you didn't want to read it. Now you do? Actually, even if you want to read it, you don't have to fight for it. I borrowed it exclusively for you, anyways. Now that you've seen my porn, you've become my friend. We can continue to exchange opinions, and…"

Lan Wangji's whole face turned white. He spoke one word at a time, "I. Will. Not. Read. It."

"He's about to explode."

"Wei Wuxian is going to die."

"May his soul rest in peace."

"I'm literally right here, you brats?!"

Wei Wuxian continued, "If you won't read it, why did you grab it? Secretly keeping it? You can't do that. I borrowed this from someone else, so I'd have to return it after you read it… Hey, hey, hey, don't come here. You're too close; I feel nervous. Let's talk nicely. You're not gonna hand this in, are you? Hand it in to whom? Old… Your uncle? Second Young Master Lan, do you think that you can let the elders see this? He'd definitely think that you already read it. With a face as thin as yours, you'd be so ashamed that you'd die…"

Lan Jingyi covered his face, “Oh my god, make him stop, make him stop! The shamelessness! I can’t!”

“Senior Wei… you really haven’t changed,” Lan Sizhui said weakly.

“Again. How in the world did you two get married!?” Jin Ling asked in total bewilderment as he gaped at the screen.

Lan Wangji filled his right hand with spiritual energy, and the book broke into thousands of millions of pieces, fluttering downward. Wei Wuxian spoke with fake regret, “What a waste! Lan Zhan, everything about you is great, except that you like to throw things everywhere. Tell me, how many wads of paper have you thrown onto the ground, in these past few days? Today, you aren’t even satisfied with throwing paper wads anymore, and instead ripped paper. You ripped it, so you clean it up yourself. I’m not gonna help.”

After watching all of that, Yu Nianzhen said, “You’re right, Cheng Cheng. I’m glad he’s all yours to deal with.”

Jiang Cheng didn’t know whether he should feel proud or unlucky.

Although it was his own book, Nie Huaisang was more amused than disgruntled. Finally he had seen how much Wei Wuxian had angered the Second Young Master Lan with it.

Lan Wangji thundered, “Get lost!”

Wei Wuxian spoke, “Well, well, look at you, Lan Zhan. Everyone says that you’re a gentleman of excellence, the bright pearl of the world, carrying yourself with incomparable courtesy, so it seems that this is all there is. Didn’t you know that causing noise is prohibited in the Cloud Recesses? And, you actually told me to “get lost.” Is this the first time that you used this phrase on somebody…”

Lan Wangji drew his sword and went at him. Wei Wuxian hurriedly hopped onto the windowsill, “Get lost it is. Getting lost is my best skill. No need to see me off!” He jumped down the Library Pavilion, laughing like a maniac.

Lan Jingyi scrubbed a hand down his face, looking stressed as if he were the one going through the ordeal, "It's finally over."

"You think that was the only time I was shameless?" Wei Wuxian laughed, "Just you wait and see."

Chapter End Notes

omg that was long and i need to sleep orz

Next chapter:

The Biling Lake incident

See you next Sunday~

Refinement V-VI

Chapter Notes

> wow, i didn't think last chapter was that funny, but i'm glad whatever I did made you guys happy!!! XD thank you so much for the love
>
> I hope you enjoy this one!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

In the forest, there was already a group of people waiting for Wei Wuxian. Nie Huaisang asked, "How did it go? Did he read it? What was he like?"

Wei Wuxian replied, "What was he like? Ha! Didn't you guys hear that loud shout he gave?"

Nie Huaisang was full of admiration, "I heard it! Wei-xiong, this is my first time hearing Lan Wangji tell someone to 'get lost'! How did you do it?"

"I can't believe Sect Leader Nie is *that* kind of friend," Lan Jingyi snickered to Lan Sizhui.

"What do you mean?" Jin Ling raised a brow. He had moved to sit with the juniors when he realized side-commenting around his uncle would only attract glares and strict lectures. Ouyang Zizhen also leaned in to listen.

Lan Jingyi explained, "You know, that useless guy who does nothing in the group, but just wants to be in on the fun and gossip."

Jin Ling laughed, "Oh, you mean *you* ?"

Angered, Lan Jingyi pointed a finger at him, "I am not! If it's anyone here, it's you!"

"You think I'm weaker than you?!" Jin Ling growled, sword half-unsheathed even though he had no spiritual power to control it. Lan Sizhui sighed, pulling Lan Jingyi back by the collar, while Ouyang Zizhen was reminding Jin Ling that he couldn't use his sword.

"Behave, you two." Lan Sizhui ordered. Surprisingly enough, they both compiled, but still shot scowls at each other.

Wei Wuxian grinned in satisfaction, "Good thing that I helped him achieve this 'first'. You all saw it, didn't you? The self-restraint and etiquette that Second Young Master Lan was praised so strongly for were all weak and useless against me."

"Wow, those words taken out of context sounds very *hmm* ," Tang Tang whispered to her friend, a secretive grin on her face.

Fei Fei scrunched her brows for a minute, before her eyes widened moments later. She giggled under her breath, pushing on Tang Tang's shoulder, "How did your mind even go there?"

"Knowing that they end up as a couple, I can't help but think that everything they say about each other has an underlying… suggestiveness to it." They both laughed, not realizing how creepy they looked to the cultivator sitting behind them.

Jiang Cheng scolded, "What are you proud of?! What is there to be proud of with this?! Do you think that it's a glorious thing to be told by someone to get lost? You bring so much shame upon our sect!"

Lan Wangji peeked at Wei Wuxian from the corner of his eye and noticed his expression hadn't changed in the slightest, as if he weren't affected by those words. He wondered how many times Wei Wuxian was told something like this that he'd grown used to it? Lan Wangji pursed his lips, hand clenched into a fist in the folds of his sleeves.

A Sect Leader affiliated with the Jin Clan snorted, "I say, if only the Yunmeng Jiang sect had put tighter reins on that boy, he wouldn't be so rowdy and shameless as he is now."

Jiang Cheng scowled even darker than that of his past counterpart, and looked over his shoulder to eye the man coldly. Noticing this, the Sect Leader sweatdropped and immediately quietened.

Wei Wuxian spoke, "I really wanted to apologize to him, but he never paid attention to me. He silenced me for so many days, so what's wrong with me having a little fun with him? I presented him the book with a nice intention. Huaisang-xiong, what happened to your treasured porn was really a pity. I didn't even get to finish it; it was so good! Lan Zhan definitely doesn't understand proper relationships. I gave it to him, yet he was still unhappy. It's such a waste of that face of his."

"So that was Sect Leader Nie's—"

The junior was shushed by his martial brother before he could continue. His martial brother's head was tilted to where their Sect Leader was just seated in hearing distance and the junior immediately nodded in understanding.

The Nie disciples were all shocked to hear that the obscene book Wei Wuxian used had actually come from their own Sect Leader. They all turned to look at the naive expression on the man's face and many couldn't believe that their art-loving and fan-enthusiast Sect Leader would be someone like that.

Nie Huaisang blurted, "Not a pity at all! I have as many as you need."

The Nie disciple's expressions went blank. They'd spoken too soon.

Jiang Cheng sneered, "You've seriously offended both Lan Wangji and Lan Qiren. Just wait for your death tomorrow! Nobody's gonna bury your corpse."

“Jiang Cheng, you’re starting to make me wonder if you’re secretly a diviner.” Wei Wuxian chuckled, grinning at his martial brother who, for a split second, had complicated emotions flitting through his eyes. But before Wei Wuxian could say anything about that, Jiang Cheng was snarling, “Shut up.”

Wei Wuxian sighed. Still as emotionally sensitive as ever.

Wei Wuxian placed his arm around Jiang Cheng’s shoulders, “Who cares as long as I tease him first? You’ve already buried my corpse so many times, so what’s wrong with once more?”

Jiang Cheng responded with a kick, “Shoo, shoo! Next time, if you do such a thing, don’t let me know! Don’t ask me to watch, either!”

“And yet, you came to watch anyway.” Wei Wuxian huffed, trying again to push Jiang Cheng into bantering with him again. He didn’t like seeing Jiang Cheng’s gaze filled with anger and remorse for the past, a past in which Wei Wuxian had told him to let go and forget already. Though he knew it was easier said than done when he had his own share of nightmares plaquing him every other night, soothed only by the gentle touches of his husband beside him.

To his relief, Jiang Cheng said with no bite, “I just came to make sure you didn’t die by Hanguang-Jun’s sword.”

“Aww, you do care for me, Cheng Cheng,” Wei Wuxian laughed when Jiang Cheng’s face turned red in mortification.

The scene faded to black and opened to Nie Huaisang rushing into Wei Wuxian’s room with an overjoyed expression, “Wei-xiong, you really struck it lucky today. The old man went to our sect’s Discussion Conference last night, so we don’t have classes for a few days!”

Lan Qiren hmphed. If he had been there, Wei Wuxian would have gotten a beating from the plank ten times over! Tainting his nephew like that… oh the headache.

Wei Wuxian quickly climbed up, beaming as he put on his boots, “This really is my lucky day — even the Heavens are helping me!” He laughed.

Jiang Cheng sat on the side, carefully cleaning his sword, “When he comes back, you’re still gonna get your punishment.”

Wei Wuxian responded, “Why should the living care about their death? I’ll just live freely as long as possible. Let’s go. I refuse to believe that I can’t find any pheasants on this mountain of the Lan Sect.”

Lan Xichen could hear his uncle mutter, “Breaking rule after rule… and he’s teaching our disciples… why did I say to make it official?”

Sect Leader Lan decided he was going to pretend not to hear them for now.

The three walked together, passing through the reception room of the Cloud Recesses. Suddenly, Wei Wuxian stopped in his tracks and exclaimed, “There are two… Lan Zhan-s!”

Several juniors laughed, while a few cultivators looked amused. They'd all thought the same thing at some point.

"Do we look that alike, Wuxian?" Lan Xichen asked kindly.

"On first glance you do!" Wei Wuxian tilted his head and looked between the two brothers this time. "But after spending so much time with Lan Zhan, you two are completely different."

Wei Wuxian could tell at once that, if the one with a stern face was Lan Wangji, the gentle one must be the other Jade of the Lan Sect—Zewu-Jun, Lan Xichen.

When Lan Wangji saw Wei Wuxian, he scrunched his brows and gave him a glare. Then he moved his gaze away and stared into the distance. On the other hand, Lan Xichen smiled, "And you are…?"

"Look at that face, Lan Zhan, you were so cute. I just want to bite him." Wei Wuxian sighed, then as if remembering something, he added, "Though if I did, he might spank me like the one in the incense burner." He pouted up at Lan Wangji as if it was his fault that his past self was like that.

Despite his red ears, Lan Wangji only said, "Don't think of such thoughts."

Jiang Cheng and Wei Wuxian greeted themselves, and Lan Xichen returned the salute. Nie Huaisang whispered softly, "Brother Xichen."

Lan Xichen turned to him, and questioned him about his studies and whether he'd pass this year. Nie Huaisang vaguely replied that he might, before he sent a helpless look to Wei Wuxian.

Wei Wuxian grinned, "Zewu-Jun, what are you two going out for?"

Lan Xichen answered, "To exterminate water ghouls. We were short of hands, so I came back to find Wangji."

Lan Wangji spoke coldly, "Brother, we do not need to engage in small talk. This matter permits no delay; it is time for us to depart."

Wei Wuxian smirked, "So quick to get rid of me, huh, husband?"

This time, Lan Wangji didn't respond but Wei Wuxian could feel the man holding him closer by the waist. He must be shy seeing his past-self's behavior, Wei Wuxian thought with a fond smile.

Wei Wuxian hurried, "Wait, wait, wait. I know how to catch water ghouls. Zewu-Jun, why don't you take us along?"

Lan Xichen smiled without words. Lan Wangji declared, "It is against the rules."

But Wei Wuxian reasoned that there were no lessons for the next few days and because Yunmeng was abundant in lakes, he and Jiang Cheng were already experienced in catching water ghouls.

"It is not necessary. The Gusu Lan sect is also…" Before Lan Wangji could finish, Lan Xichen spoke while smiling, "Sure, then. Many thanks for your help. Do some preparations, and we can depart together. Huaisang, are you coming as well?"

"Thank the gods for Zewu-Jun." Fei Fei murmured. She'd thought Hanguang-Jun really wasn't going to let his future husband come along!

"He's helping his brother pursue his loved one. What a silent hero," Tang Tang agreed, sniffling into her handkerchief.

Nie Huaisang rejected coming. Wei Wuxian and Jiang Cheng went back to their rooms to prepare.

Lan Wangji looked at them from behind, his brows knitted with confusion, "Brother, why did you decide to bring them? Exterminating ghouls is no laughing matter."

"The head disciple and only son of Sect Leader Jiang are quite well-known in Yunmeng. It is likely that they know more than just joking around."

The phrase "I beg to differ " was written all over Lan Wangji's face.

"Jiang Cheng, are you seeing this!? The Second Young Master Lan is trash-talking us behind our backs." Wei Wuxian exclaimed in dramatic disbelief. Jiang Cheng, who didn't look surprised that he was, only rolled his eyes at him.

"Was not." Lan Wangji said.

Wei Wuxian turned to him, "Lan Er-gege, you know lying is forbidden, right?"

"Was not lying."

"Then what did I just hear you tell Zewu-Jun the moment we left, hmm?"

"Only concerned that you would not take it seriously," Lan Wangji explained, implying that his past-self hadn't seen Wei Wuxian act serious the entire time he was in Cloud Recesses.

Wei Wuxian scoffed, "I take things like this pretty seriously all the time. Right, kids?"

The Gusu Lan juniors exchanged glances, recalling all the times Senior Wei was laughing up in a tree as he watched them struggle fighting against monsters and fierce corpses by themselves.

"Y-Yes, Senior Wei… "

Lan Xichen spoke again, "And you wish for him to go as well, do you not?"

Lan Wangji was stunned.

Lan Xichen, "I only agreed because you looked as if you wanted the head disciple of Sect Leader Jiang to come with you."

"He did?" Lan Jingyi said in disbelief.

"He definitely didn't look like he wanted Senior Wei to come, that's for sure." Jin Ling nodded self-assuredly.

Ouyang Zizhen interjected, "Ah, but what if inside, Hanguang-Jun really did want Senior Wei to come but he just didn't want to show it?"

Lan Jingyi squinted and nodded slowly, "Oh yeah, that makes sense. Only Zewu-Jun and Senior Wei can read Hanguang-Jun's subtle expressions."

Jin Ling scrunched his brows, "But why would he do that?"

Ouyang Zizhen shrugged, "He's probably confused about his feelings for Senior Wei at this point and wants to avoid him."

Lan Sizhui was looking at Ouyang Zizhen as if he was trying to understand how his mind worked.

Only after a while did Lan Wangji finally respond, speaking with great difficulty, "There was no such thing."

Tang Tang slowly smiled, "Ooh, looks like Zewu-Jun was right." She giddily clapped her hands, excited to see the outcome of this.

Lan Wangji shut his mouth when Wei Wuxian and Jiang Cheng arrived. The group mounted their swords and set off.

In Caiyi Town, Wei Wuxian bought two jars of rice wine and gave one to Jiang Cheng, "Gusu people talk in such a sugary way. How is this arguing? If they see how Yunmeng people argue, they might be scared to death… Why are you looking at me, Lan Zhan? It's not that I'm too stingy to buy you any—aren't people from your sect prohibited from drinking alcohol?"

"It's because he was talking to a girl, isn't it?" Fei Fei guessed.

"Aww Hanguang-Jun and his early jealousy phase," Tang Tang grinned, and when they looked at each other, they started giggling like mad.

The cultivator behind them was slowly inching away, looking around for another sitting spot.

The group boarded narrow boats, and rowed toward where the water ghouls gathered. Lan Xichen explained that Caiyi Town hadn't had water ghouls in over ten years but there had been recent drownings in the past few months. They had set up arrays and the corpses they found were people not from the town.

As Wei Wuxian looked down, he saw the bottom of Lan Wangji's boat. He shouted, "Lan Zhan, look at me!"

Lan Wangji looked up, only to see Wei Wuxian's bamboo paddle sweep up a splash of water and strike it toward him. With a tap of his foot, Lan Wangji lightly hopped onto another boat, dodging the spray. He was quite angered, thinking to himself that, sure enough, Wei Wuxian was here to fool around, "How ridiculous!"

For the first time, Wei Wuxian heard Lan Wangji's thoughts, and he shook the man's sleeve, "Lan Zhan, I heard your thoughts just now! Ah, you really didn't have a good impression of me, huh?" He teased, knowing this already.

Lan Wangji couldn't help but think, of all of his rambling thoughts about Wei Wuxian's pretty grin to his fearless spirit, this device decided to choose when he was thinking about Wei Ying unfavorably. But on second thought, this might've been for the best, recalling some of his rather…. unclean thoughts about the other that had plagued his dreams after the book incident.

Meanwhile, the others were shocked at what Wei Wuxian did. Was he really so naughty in the past that he'd even play around during such a serious event?

Wei Wuxian kicked the side of the boat and tipped it over using the bamboo paddle. On the bottom of the boat, there were three water ghouls with swelling faces and ashen skin, tightly clinging onto the wooden boards!

"Water ghouls!"

"So that's why Senior Wei did it."

"How did he know?!"

The juniors talked to each other in amazement, while the adults grimaced. Their juniors were becoming more and more amazed by Wei Wuxian as if they'd completely forgotten all of the terrors he did as Yiling Patriarch.

No doubt it was this contraption's fault!

A disciple who stood nearby immediately suppressed the three. Lan Xichen smiled, "Young Master Wei, how did you know that they were below the boats?"

Wei Wuxian knocked on the side of the boat, "Simple! The displacement of water was wrong. He was the only person who stood on the boat, yet the displacement was greater than those of boats that carried two people. There must have been something on the bottom."

"So always be observant of your surroundings, kids." Wei Wuxian lectured the juniors with a wag of his finger. They nodded in understanding and Wei Wuxian smiled at how adorably obedient they were.

Lan Xichen praised him, "You are experienced indeed."

Wei Wuxian's paddle lightly glided through the water, and the boat's speed quickened, so that he was right next to Lan Wangji's boat. He spoke, "Lan Zhan, I didn't splash water on you on purpose. Water ghouls are really clever. If I said it out loud, they would've heard it and got away. Hey, don't ignore me. Why don't you look at me, Second Young Master Lan?"

"There he goes again with the 'look at me' line." Lan Jingyi pointed out with an i-know-what's-going-on smile, "I mean, I don't ask Sizhui to always look at me when I talk to him."

Ouyang Zizhen nodded with a matching smile, "It's true love in the air."

Lan Wangji finally gave him a glance, "Why did you come?"

Wei Wuxian spoke with sincerity, "I'm here to apologize to you. Last night was my fault. I was wrong."

Lan Wangji's countenance was slightly dark. Wei Wuxian asked although he knew the answer, "Why do you look so gloomy? Don't worry. Today, I'm really here to help."

"But I'm still confused. How did Lan Wangji fall for someone this annoying?" Jin Ling said as if he didn't know Wei Wuxian was listening in on their conversation.

"Oi, I'm not only annoying, I'm adorable!" Wei Wuxian said in his defense, "Right, Lan Zhan?"

"Mm."

Ouyang Zizhen presented a different argument, "Persistence, I guess? Maybe Hanguang-Jun likes Wei Wuxian's type."

"The annoyingly mischievous, completely insane, and won't stop talking type? Only somebody like Hanguang-Jun would marry it." Jiang Cheng cut in with a snort.

Wei Wuxian sneered, "He means the incredibly handsome, incredibly talented and incredibly brilliant type, Jiang Cheng. Maybe if you didn't have ridiculous standards, you'd be married too."

"You little—!"

Lan Wangji, the subject of this conversation, only lightly sighed and pretended not to hear any of it. Though he did make sure Wei Ying didn't get up and fight with Jiang Wanyin.

Jiang Cheng snapped at them, "If you want to help, then stop chattering and come here!"

A disciple shouted, "The net moved!"

Wei Wuxian beamed, "It's here, it's here!"

Thick, long hair formed veils of black satin, surging and swelling around the boats with pairs of ghastly hands gripping onto the sides. Lan Wangji backhandedly drew his sword, Bichen, and severed ten-or-so wrists on the left of the boat, leaving only palms with fingers digging

deep into the wood. A red light flashed past on the right side, and Wei Wuxian's sword was already back in its sheath.

Lan Wangji could tell that the sword Wei Wuxian carried was of very high quality. He asked with a serious face, "What is the name of this sword?"

Wei Wuxian answered, "Suibian."

"Whatever?" A cultivator questioned with a tilt of his head.

Lan Wangji stared at him. Wei Wuxian thought that he didn't hear properly, so he repeated it again, "Suibian."

Lan Wangji frowned, "This sword has a spirit. Calling it as one pleases is disrespectful."

Wei Wuxian let out a sigh, "Think outside the box, won't you? I wasn't asking you to call it whatever you wanted to, but the name of my sword just happens to be 'Suibian'. Here, look." As he spoke, he passed the sword over for Lan Wangji to see the characters on the sword. It was "Suibian", indeed.

Lan Wangji was at a loss for words.

Even the juniors were speechless. They had all thought up names for their swords, some going for extravagant ones like 'Piercing Sun' or 'Dragon Claw', to more elegant ones like 'Brightcrest' or 'Silver Moon'. But of all names, why did Wei Wuxian choose Suibian?

Wei Wuxian explained that there's no special meaning to it. He came up with more than twenty names when Uncle Jiang gave him the sword but wasn't satisfied with any of them. So he told Uncle Jiang 'Whatever!' and he really forged these two characters on it. Wei Wuxian ended the story, "To be honest, this name isn't bad either, right?"

Jiang Cheng snorted, still wanting to rile Wei Wuxian up after his comment earlier, "It's ridiculous."

Wei Wuxian raised his brows, turning to his brother with a sharp grin, "You have no room to speak, Jiang Cheng. You're even worse at naming stuff than I am."

Jiang Cheng scoffed, "Who made you the judge of that?!"

"Your dog naming is terrible. Jasmine, Princess, and Little Love." Wei Wuxian reminded in a monotone voice.

"What's wrong with those names?" Jin Ling cut in, defending his uncle.

Lan Jingyi snickered, "Jin Ling, I think I now know where your bad naming sense came from."

Jin Ling's offended look matched his uncle's and several juniors couldn't help but laugh a little.

Finally, Lan Wangji spoke through gritted teeth, "… Ridiculous!"

Wei Wuxian carried his sword on his shoulder, "You're such a boring person. Don't you see how fun this name is? It's especially good at tricking serious ones like you, and it works every single time. Haha!"

"Have you no better things to do than tease and torment my nephew?" Lan Qiren could see so much of Cangse Sanren in Wei Wuxian's teenage years that he felt a lot of empathy for his nephew in that moment.

"But Lan Zhan asked! And he liked my story, right Lan Zhan?"

"Mm." Lan Zhan said, eyes doting on Wei Wuxian.

Lan Qiren clicked his tongue and looked away. It was no point arguing against a married couple.

At the same time, a long shadow darted around the small boat. Jiang Cheng saw it and immediately yelled, "It's coming again!"

Everyone unconsciously began straightening their backs where they sat on the floor, getting ready to watch a battle that was no doubt going to be amazing. But while everyone was in an excited mood, Wei Wuxian couldn't help but finally voice his concerns to his husband.

"Hey, Lan Zhan." Wei Wuxian whispered, frowning down at his stomach, "I don't feel full."

Lan Wangji furrowed his brows, "Wei Ying?"

"I mean, when I ate those pastries, they didn't make my stomach feel full despite eating two big ones." He placed a hand over himself, where his golden core would have been, and as he expected, there was nothing there. But for some reason…

"Lan Zhan, could there be spiritual powers keeping me sustained too?" Wei Wuxian wondered, eyes staring wide at Lan Wangji's puzzled expression. His husband slightly frowned, then placed his own hand over Wei Wuxian's belly, closing his eyes to concentrate.

Even though his spiritual powers couldn't be used, he tried to redirect what little he could to flow into Wei Wuxian's abdomen. It seemed to work for only a short time, until all of a sudden, Lan Wangji's eyes flew open in surprise.

Wei Wuxian was watching him, "Lan Zhan, what happened?"

Lan Wangji didn't answer and instead, grabbed Wei Wuxian's wrist, checking his meridians. Wei Wuxian waited silently, then finally his husband lowered his hand, a sigh of relief escaping him.

"Lan Zhan?"

Lan Wangji offered him a small smile, "Wei Ying is correct. There are spiritual powers keeping you sustained." He paused for a moment, then said, "Mine."

Wei Wuxian’s eyes widened, “How is that possible?”

Lan Wangji shook his head, also clueless. He didn’t know how his spiritual powers could be inside Wei Wuxian when he hadn’t been sending a stream of spiritual powers to him this entire time. But there was no mistaking the spiritual signature inside Wei Wuxian— they were his.

They could only continue to ruminate as they once more paid attention to the screen.

Chapter End Notes

hehe can you guess why? ;D it's actually fairly simple lol

next chapter:

- The Biling Lake part 2 aka cool fight scenes and husbando saving

See you next Sunday~

Refinement VII

Chapter Notes

> I can't believe half of ya'll said wwx is pregnant while the other half is going sex HAHAHA but the answer will be revealed… most likely at the end of this fic XD
>
> also this chapter might not be as interesting as previous ones cos i just go with my gut feel on how these characters might react, and i dunno why they just didn't wanna give me interesting reactions today lol dflskdjl but hope you all still enjoy it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A few disciples paddled and used nets to chase after the underwater shadow, but they didn't catch anything.

Wei Wuxian spoke, "That's strange. The shape of this shadow doesn't seem like a human. It's also sometimes long and sometimes short, sometimes large and sometimes small… Lan Zhan, beside your boat!"

The Bichen on Lan Wangji's back unsheathed and stabbed into the water. After a moment, it flew out of the river, but it didn't pierce anything.

Brother Liu narrowed his eyes and stroked his chin, "This doesn't seem like a normal water ghoul."

A disciple also drew out his sword and thrust it toward a dark shadow in the water.

"Hey, he looks familiar." Lan Jingyi said, pointing at the disciple.

Jin Ling frowned, "Really? Well, I wouldn't know since he's from Gusu Lan."

Lan Sizhui replied, "But I don't think I've ever seen a senior who looks like him in Cloud Recess."

"That's true." A Gusu Lan junior nodded, squinting his eyes at the person on the screen.

Nearby, Wei Wuxian was grimacing. He didn't miss seeing Su She's face at all. Most of the other cultivators in the room who knew him were also beginning to gossip and chat about him.

But the disciple paled when he couldn't summon his sword.

An older disciple spoke, "Su She, right now, we still haven't determined what the underwater creatures are. Why did you drive your sword into the water on your own?"

The juniors' mouth dropped.

"That's Su She?!"

Lan Jingyi scrunched his face in disdain, "I never thought I'd see that man wearing our Gusu Lan sect robes."

Lan Sizhui reminded him, "Don't be too disrespectful of the dead, Jingyi."

"Yeah, yeah."

Lan Xichen frowned at Su She on the screen, wondering what he could have done to prevent this boy from turning into that vengeful man in his future.

Su She said, "I saw that Second Young Master also…" Then he flushed in embarrassment and murmured, "I… I was too full of myself." He glimpsed at Lan Wangji, but Lan Wangji was attentively observing the water.

Lan Jingyi rolled his eyes, "Of course, he tried to be like Hanguang-Jun. Why am I not surprised."

Wei Wuxian clicked his tongue when he noticed that glance, "Don't look at Lan Zhan like that."

Lan Wangji, in turn, didn't care about the man who had been a nuisance to him since he and Wie Wuxian were teenagers. Su She had placed a target on his back the moment he decided to participate in Jin Guangyao's schemes which ultimately led to Wei Ying's death.

The tip of Bichen whisked up a piece of shadow from the water and a pile of wet, black mess fell onto the floor of the boat with a plop. Wei Wuxian saw it was a piece of clothing.

Wei Wuxian laughed hard, "Lan Zhan, you're so impressive! This is my first time seeing someone remove a water ghoul's clothing when they're catching water ghouls."

Lan Wangji simply examined Bichen's tip. Jiang Cheng spoke, "You should shut up. The thing that swam underwater really wasn't a water ghoul. There was only a piece of clothing!"

"Don't tell me it's a Waterborne Abyss?" Brother Liu asked, though he sounded sure of his answer already.

Wei Wuxian looked over his shoulder and smiled, "You're really smart. May I ask for this esteemed one's name?"

The man straightened his back and bowed from where he was seated, "From the Nanhu Liu clan, I am Liu Wei, courtesy name Liu Dazhong."

From behind, a cultivator whispered to another, "He's that guy who aced all of Sect Leader Yang's tests, and even got Lan Qiren's approval despite being so young."

"Ah really?"

Wei Wuxian thought, 'Of course I also saw it. I just don't feel satisfied without teasing Lan Wangji a few times.'

Jiang Cheng sighed in exasperation, "Your head is just literally full of Hanguang-Jun. Who wants to hear any of this?"

"It's not like I'm the one forcing you to listen to them." Wei Wuxian defended.

Meanwhile, Tang Tang and Fei Fei were very tempted to voice out 'WE DO', but Sect Leader Jiang was still Sect Leader Jiang who was just too scary to confront so they obediently kept their mouths shut.

He spoke, "So, the thing that was sneaking around was just this piece of clothing? Now that's why the nets couldn't catch it and swords couldn't pierce it. Its shape was always different. However, a piece of clothing couldn't have swallowed up a whole sword. There must be something else inside the water."

At that moment, the boats already floated toward the center of Biling Lake. The color of the lake was an extremely dark shade of green. Suddenly, Lan Wangji lifted his head, "Go back immediately."

Lan Xichen asked, "Why?"

Lan Wangji answered, "The underwater creatures led the boats to the center of Biling Lake on purpose."

Wei Wuxian noticed the almost black color of the Biling Lake and someone shouted, "What is that!?"

He was pointing to a whirlpool that made their boats start sinking, "We're being sucked in!"

"So it is the Waterborne Abyss!" Liu Dazhong exclaimed with shock, eyes watching the screen as he stared at such monstrosity for the first time.

"How terrifying." A female cultivator said, clutching at her handkerchief.

"But how could one be in Caiyi Town? Aren't the people of Gusu well known swimmers like in Yunmeng?"

Wen Ning remembered hearing about a Waterborne Abyss in one of the Wen sect's territories back then and that Wen Chao had been the one to exterminate it. Now he's seeing that there was an unexpected demon in Caiyi Town and it didn't take a genius like Master Wei to guess why.

Everyone mounted their swords and flew upward. Wei Wuxian looked down to find Su She was already knee-deep inside the water. Without hesitation, Wei Wuxian bent down and stretched his arm out, grabbing Su She's wrist and pulling him up.

" *You* saved that man's life before?" Lan Jingyi said in surprise. There were many older cultivators also shocked by this fact.

“And he had the nerve to end yours years later? Was he born with a brain deficiency or something? He owes you his life.” Jin Ling hissed.

Lan Sizhui nodded, “I agree. There is no honor in backstabbing.”

Wei Wuxian warmly chuckled, “Aww you guys. You care for me too much.” He pressed a hand against his heart and sighed, leaning back against Hanguang-Jun.

The demon reached out with a water tentacle to capture Wei Wuxian but he zipped away in his sword. However, the sword under his feet dipped abruptly due to the weight. Not long after, a strong force suddenly came from Su She, almost pulling Wei Wuxian off of his sword.

The lower part of Su She’s body was already submerged inside the black whirlpool of the lake. There seemed to be something underwater holding onto his legs and pulling them down. When Jiang Cheng saw this, he dashed toward them, “Wei Wuxian, here!”

“Should have let that guy go,” Jiang Cheng grumbled, not happy about seeing Su She either.

Jiang Cheng reached out for him, but Wei Wuxian was only inches away from him when he was suddenly grabbed underwater. The sucking force of the lake was too strong and Wei Wuxian submerged to the sound of Jiang Cheng shouting his name.

There were several gasps as Wei Wuxian was pulled under.

Jiang Cheng’s face darkened at seeing this again, and he couldn’t help but criticize his own past-self. He was so weak, why couldn’t he even do anything?

The shadows in the water stretched around Wei Wuxian’s body, pulling him into the watery vortex.

Lan Wangji slightly pursed his lips, not liking how close he had been to losing Wei Wuxian that day.

When he was about to be engulfed by the shadows, Wei Wuxian recalled what he said in Lan Qiren’s class about resentful spirits, and the screen showed countless corpses underwater. Then Wei Wuxian began to move his fingers as a swirl of resentful energy crawled towards him.

Several people’s eyes widened, realizing this was the first time Wei Wuxian made contact with the resentful energies. And it was while he tried saving someone’s life.

Suddenly, Wei Wuxian felt his collar tighten, and he was lifted out of the water and into the air. He turned around to see Lan Wangji holding the back of his collar with one hand. He managed to carry three people on his sword and fought with the mysterious force of the lake at the same time, while rising at a steady pace.

“So even Hanguang-Jun saved that ungrateful man,” Lan Jingyi scoffed, arms crossed over his chest.

“Okay but are you seeing this? Hanguang-Jun is carrying two men by the collar while on his sword?!” Jin Ling was pointing out in awe.

Lan Sizhui nodded dumbly with bright eyes, “And while he’s our age too.”

“Damn,” Ouyang Zizhen muttered in amazement.

“Now do you believe in the arm strength of the Gusu Lan sect?” Lan Jingyi said to the juniors in general and they all rapidly nodded their heads, afraid that Jingyi would offer another live demonstration.

Jiang Cheng was shocked, ‘If I went down to pull Wei Wuxian before him, using Sandu, I probably couldn’t have ascended so quickly and steadily. Lan Wangji is only around my age…’

“Jiang Cheng, you sound just like the juniors.” Wei Wuxian snorted, then he teasingly said, “And wow, look who’s thinking about Lan Zhan now too, hmm?” Then he paused, expression odd, “Actually wait, no, don’t think about my husband, Jiang Cheng. That’s just weird.”

“I don’t think of him the way that you do, idiot!” Jiang Cheng growled, looking comically offended.

At this point, Wei Wuxian spoke, “Lan Zhan, your sword is quite strong, isn’t it? Thank you, thank you. But why did you pull my collar? Can’t you hold on to me? I don’t feel comfortable if you do this. Why don’t I stretch my hand to you and you can grab it?”

Lan Wangji replied with a cold voice, “I do not like physical contact with others.”

Tang Tang couldn’t help but let out a loud snort before she hastily covered it with a cough, flushing under the gazes that turned to her. But she wasn’t the only one who saw the irony in those words. Remembering what Lan Wangji let Wei Wuxian do after bringing him to the Jingshi, many felt as if Lan Zhan had indeed changed.

Meanwhile, others, especially the juniors, were seeing the difference of a not-in-love Lan Wangji compared to an in-love Lan Wangji in the future.

Wei Wuxian was also amused as the man who got to experience the full taste of being ‘touched’ by Lan Wangji. “Ah I’m sorry, Lan Zhan, I forgot you didn’t like physical contact. Why don’t I just sit over — Hahahaha, Lan Zhan, you won’t let me move at all.”

Lan Wangji, who was keeping a firm grip over his husband’s hip, said nothing. He could only think that his past-self was much too ignorant back then.

Wei Wuxian asked, “We’re already this familiar with each other, so how am I ‘others’?”

Lan Wangji retorted, “We are not.”

Wei Wuxian pretended to be hurt, “You can’t do this…”

Jiang Cheng scolded, "You can't do this!!! Can't you speak a few sentences less while you're held in mid-air by your collar?!"

"Noooo, let him talk some more until Hanguang-Jun snaps ah!" Fei Fei whispered to Tang Tang who snickered along with her.

The group travelled on their swords and evacuated Biling Lake as fast as they could. When they landed, Lan Wangji let go of Wei Wuxian's back collar and calmly turned to Lan Xichen, "It is a Waterborne Abyss."

Lan Xichen shook his head, "Then, this is going to be difficult."

Lan Wangji asked if there were any places suffering from a Waterborne Abyss, and Lan Xichen pointed at the sky where the sun was. The scene suddenly changed to a brief show of Wen Chao telling his subordinates to chase the Waterborne Abyss away from their territory, his face sinister under the lanterns.

Inevitably, several people began scowling and glaring at the screen.

"That damn Qishan Wen sect. Of course, they would let somebody else fight their own problems."

"Horribly selfish, I say! They say they're the best but can't even deal with a Waterborne Abyss of their own."

"They don't care about harming others as long as their own precious sect is fine." One spat out.

Wen Ning did not shrink from these accusations about his previous clan. He's long heard every vile insult directed at them and he knew they had some grounds to be angry. The Wen sect at the time had done horrible things. He just wished that his own little family hadn't been caught in the crossfire.

One disciple complained about this harming Caiyi Town. Lan Xichen sighed, "Let it go. Let us go back to the town."

They boarded new boats at the crossing point and paddled toward an area of town where a lot of people gathered. After passing the arch bridge and entering the river paths, Wei Wuxian looked at his reflection in the water, examining if his hair was messed up. Wei Wuxian then threw a series of charming winks at both sides of the path, "Sisters, how much for half a kilogram of loquats?"

"There he goes again," Jiang Cheng said with a hint of amusement.

Lan Wangji breathed in.

One woman lifted her bamboo hat, smiling, "Young beau, you needn't pay. How 'bout I can give you one for free?"

Lan Wangji breathed out.

Wei Wuxian couldn't help but eye his husband a little cautiously, "Lan Zhan, you know that was me from the past right? I don't dare flirt with anyone but you now."

Lan Wangji only nodded, still silent.

Wei Wuxian cupped his hands together, "If it's given to me by Sister, then I definitely want it!"

The woman threw him a round, golden loquat, "You needn't be so polite. It's for how handsome you look!"

Wei Wuxian turned around, perfectly catching it, and grinned, "Sister looks even prettier!"

"Ah, ah, Lan Zhan… my waist… you're kind of holding it a bit too tight…Lan Er-gege?"

Dissatisfied with Senior Wei's acts, Lan Jingyi huffed, "Senior Wei dares to be so flirty in front of Hanguang-Jun. You deserve whatever punishment he gives you."

Wei Wuxian snorted, "Lan Zhan calls them punishments, but they're more like — ow! Lan Zhan, don't pinch me so hard! I'm going to get bruises."

Lan Wangji was staring straight ahead. Wei Wuxian smugly tossed the toquat in his hand, and suddenly pointed at him, "Sisters, do you think that he looks handsome?"

Lan Wangji didn't expect Wei Wuxian to suddenly talk about him at all. Just as he was unsure of how to respond, the women on the river spoke in harmony, "Even more handsome!" Amid this, there seemed to be the laughter of a few men.

Wei Wuxian cooed, forgetting already his vinegar drinking husband, "Aww, little Lan Zhan doesn't know what to do."

Jiang Cheng rolled his eyes skyward.

Wei Wuxian spoke, "Then, does anyone want to give him one? If you only give me and not him, I'm afraid he might be jealous when we go back!"

The woman tossed him another and Wei Wuxian exchanged more sweet words with them.

Then Wei Wuxian held the loquat in front of Lan Wangji's eyes. Lan Wangji didn't move his gaze, "Move."

Wei Wuxian moved it away, "I knew that you definitely wouldn't accept it, so I never intended to give it to you. Jiang Cheng, catch!"

Tang Tang had to roll her eyes, "Oh my gods, this kid."

"He's such a flirt," Fei Fei shook her head.

Jiang Cheng caught the loquat with one hand, a slight smile appearing on his face, but immediately snorted, "You're being all flirty again?"

Wei Wuxian smirked, "Get lost!" Then, he turned around and asked, "Lan Zhan, you're from Gusu, so you know how to speak in this dialect, right? Teach me. How do you swear in the Gusu dialect?"

Lan Wangji threw a "pathetic" at him, and got on another boat.

Wei Wuxian pouted, "Lan Zhan, to this day, I haven't heard you speak in that dialect to me."

"You never asked."

That perked him up, "So you'll do it?"

Lan Zhan inclined his head, "When we get back."

Wei Wuxian slumped down beside him, whining, "That's going to take forever!"

Lan Wangji stood side by side with Lan Xichen, similar troubled expressions on their face.

An extremely heavy boat came from in front of them, filled with buckets of large, golden loquats. Lan Wangji took one glance at it, and continued to look straight ahead.

Yet, Lan Xichen spoke to him, "If you want to eat loquats, should we buy one basket?"

"..."

Lan Wangji went off with a flick of his sleeves, "I do not!" He went to stand on another boat.

Wei Wuxian kicked out his legs in laughter, practically laying his upper half on Lan Wangji's lap now. "Brother Xichen, you teased Lan Zhan after I did."

"Wangji is just fun to tease sometimes." Lan Xichen admitted to which Lan Wangji softly sighed.

"Don't I know it!" Wei Wuxian laughed.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Punishment and Bunnies!

See you next Sunday~!

Refinement VIII (1)

Chapter Notes

> thank you so much for the kind words last chapter! Was feeling insecure about my writing lately but seeing all of your comments really made me happy!! ;w; and *whispers* how did this reach 2k kudos already /screams
>
> (also this chapter doesn't have the bunnies scene cos I underestimated the length orz the other half of this chapter will be next week instead!)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Wei Wuxian was seen climbing up the walls of Cloud Recesses again, carrying jars of Emperor Smiles. He's surprised when Lan Wangji suddenly calls out to him, "Those who return after curfew will not be allowed back in after seven in the morning. Out."

"Ah! Eh?"

Wei Wuxian snickered at their second time meeting in the rooftops, and he couldn't help but say, "I'm so naughty, Hanguang-Jun. You should punish me after this."

Lan Wangji side-eyed him before looking away, "You've already been punished for this."

Dirty thoughts abruptly halted, Wei Wuxian scowled, "That's not what I meant."

He saw the slightest twitch of Lan Wangji's lips as he replied, "I know."

Wei Wuxian turned around, "Hey Lan Zhan! What a coincidence, it's you again!"

Lan Wangji ignored his greeting as he moved to catch him. Wei Wuxian immediately avoided him.

"Aww, why are you like this?" Wei Wuxian whined.

Fei Fei hid behind her hands and groaned into them, "Why are they so cute together ah?"

"Hey, hey, don't cover your face." Tang Tang shook her friend's shoulder, "You're missing out!"

Lan Wangji said, "If a guest breaks curfew too many times, they will need to receive punishment at the Lan Sect ancestral hall."

"There's only the two of us here. If you don't talk and I don't talk, then nobody would know whether or not I broke curfew, right?" Wei Wuxian grinned cheekily, "I promise there won't

be a next time. We're already so familiar with each other, so can't you just do me a small favor?"

Lan Qiren took a deep breath, reminding himself that Wei Wuxian was no longer the fifteen year old menace from before, and that he could (mostly) conduct himself like an adult, so there was no reason to be concerned for his guest and clan juniors' innocence.

Meanwhile on the juniors' side, Lan Jingyi was stroking his nonexistent beard, grinning along to Wei Wuxian's words.

Lan Wangji responded, "Hmph. Not familiar."

Wei Wuxian cackled, "Lan Zhan, Ah Lan Zhan, you're really cute."

"You keep saying that."

"And I won't stop saying it! You're really, really cute, Lan Er-gege." He lowered his voice by the end of it, grinning at his red-eared husband.

Then Lan Wangji grabbed his sword and charged forward. They began sword fighting. "Are you really not gonna let this go? Huh?!" Wei Wuxian exclaimed as he juggled to save his jars while deflecting Lan Wangji's attacks.

Lan Wangji only demanded, "Receive your punishment."

"Fine!" Wei Wuxian suddenly stopped dodging, threw himself to Lan Wangji and clung to him. They both plummeted outside the wall of the Cloud Recesses.

Several Gusu Lan juniors gasped. Senior Wei just made Hanguang-Jun break the rules!

Tang Tang and Fei Fei were also gasping, but for completely different reasons.

"Oh my heavens, did you *see* the way he threw himself at--!"

"I know! He clung to him with both arms and legs, I'm--"

The girls squealed a little too loudly, prompting a few cultivators to look strangely back at them.

Wei Wuxian was laughing as he still held onto a struggling Lan Wangji, "Now, you're also outside the Cloud Recesses. We both broke the curfew, and you can't be harsh toward others and loose toward yourself. If you punish me, you'd have to punish yourself as well. Equal treatment. How does that sound?"

Lan Sizhui glanced at his friend and narrowed his eyes, "Jingyi."

Lan Jingyi turned to him and blinked, "What?"

Lan Wangji finally extracted himself from him and got up.

Wei Wuxian sat on the side and promised, "Don't worry. I won't tell anyone else. The only ones who know about this are the sky, the Earth, and us two."

Lan Wangji walked off without saying a word.

"Jingyi, I swear, if you ever try something like this--"

"Hey! I haven't even said anything?!"

"But you looked awfully interested," Jin Ling cut in.

Lan Jingyi rolled his eyes, "You know I don't break the rules *that* often, right?"

The silence that followed was answer enough.

The next morning, Lan Wangji entered their room full of drunk people and empty jars of alcohol. Nie Huaisang furiously pushed Wei Wuxian, "Wei-xiong! Wei-xiong!"

Wei Wuxian spoke drowsily, "Who? Is anyone else up for it?! Jiang Cheng? The fight is on—like I'm scared of you!"

A cultivator snorted in amusement, "He's so out of it. Clearly Wei Wuxian isn't good at holding his liquor."

Another cultivator, who was a woman that looked similar to the man, scoffed, "He's just a kid here. *You* can barely even stand after three sips!"

He immediately flushed, hushing at his sister, "Jie!"

Jiang Cheng randomly grabbed a book and hurled it at where Wei Wuxian's voice came from, "Shut up!"

Jin Ling's eyes sparkled when he saw his young uncle looking so unkempt and drunk. He seemed more... approachable this way.

"Uncle!"

"Shut it, A-Ling." Jiang Cheng didn't wanna hear it. No doubt this kid was going to start asking him about drinking alcohol now that he saw him doing it at an inappropriate age. He internally sighed.

Lan Wangji's gaze turned frigid at the sight of one of Nie Huaisang's illustrated pornography books. Wei Wuxian mumbled a few sentences, hugging the book to his chest, and went back to sleep. Lan Wangji used one hand to grip Wei Wuxian's back collar, lifting him up, and dragging him in the direction of the door.

"Senior Wei is incredible, breaking all those rules while in Gusu. Is he not afraid of punishment?" A junior cultivator asked, feeling sympathy pains for younger Wei Wuxian's near future.

Wei Wuxian was finally half-awake. He turned around, "Lan Zhan, what are you doing?"

Lan Wangji didn't say any words. Seeing that Wei Wuxian was caught by Lan Wangji again, Jiang Cheng hurried outside and asked, "What's happening? What are you doing?"

Lan Wangji turned his head, speaking one word at a time, "To receive. His. Punishment."

The Gusu Lan disciples began shrinking back a little. A few of them were glad that they'd never been caught by Hanguang-Jun before, while the others were wincing in memory. Although, they had to be grateful that the man wasn't half as angry as he was with Wei Wuxian.

When Lan Wangji dragged Wei Wuxian over to the ancestral hall, two of senior cultivators immediately came up, firmly holding Wei Wuxian in place. Wei Wuxian half-knelt on the ground, "Lan Zhan, are you going to punish me?"

Tang Tang and Fei Fei snorted.

Lan Wangji stared at him coldly.

Wei Wuxian spoke, "I won't accept this."

Then all of a sudden, Lan Wangji lifted the bottom of his white clothes, and knelt down beside Wei Wuxian.

The juniors gasped once more.

"Hanguang-Jun received punishment too?!"

"No way!!"

"Is this why Hanguang-Jun has those scars on his back?"

"No," Lan Sizhui said, "Those were caused by the discipline whips which are more brutal than the rulers."

The disciples outside of Gusu Lan paled. Although they highly respected Gusu Lan sect for creating some of the best cultivators in the world, a lot of the younger minds feared the thought of ever stepping into that place with too many unreasonable rules to live. It's like one wrong move in there would get them beaten so hard, ah!

Seeing this, Wei Wuxian turned pale with fear. He tried to get up, but Lan Wangji commanded, "Strike!"

Wei Wuxian gaped with astonishment. He hurriedly spoke, "Wait, wait, I accept this, I accept this, Lan Zhan. I was wrong… Gah!"

Several cultivators not used to seeing such punishment winced at the sight of those kids getting struck a hundred times. Wei Wuxian didn't hold back his wailing and howling either, making the disciples watching cringe.

Even those who didn't like the Yiling Patriarch to begin with felt the imaginary pains Wei Wuxian must be experiencing in that moment. Of course there were those who didn't care at all, thinking that Wei Wuxian deserved any kind of punishment thrown at him. He was clearly such a disobedient runt, but sadly no amount of punishment would divert his evil ways in the future.

Meanwhile, Wei Wuxian took the time admiring Lan Wangji instead, sighing at how strong his husband was, even at fifteen years old, while he looked like a complete wimp beside him. He had to chuckle at the funny sight they made, and when Lan Wangji looked at him curiously, Wei Wuxian just snuggled to his side.

Lan Wangji's back was upright and his kneeling position stayed proper for the whole duration. After the beating finished, Lan Wangji silently stood up and walked outside after saluting toward the disciples in the ancestral hall. Wei Wuxian was carried onto Jiang Cheng's back, and groaned for the whole way. The youths all surrounded them, asking why Lan Zhan was punished with him too.

Wei Wuxian gave them a long summary of what happened that night. Then he added, "Jiang Cheng, walk slower. You're almost shaking me off."

Lan Wangji's lips curled the tiniest bit down, as he silently thought, 'I want to be the one to carry Wei Ying.'

Jiang Cheng shouted, "Is simply carrying you not up to your standards?!"

Wei Wuxian whined, "I never asked you to carry me, in the beginning."

Wei Wuxian sighed out loud, "I wish it had been Lan Zhan carrying me instead. He would have done it better."

Lan Wangji smiled. As expected, his husband thought the same.

Jiang Cheng sneered, "As if I wanted to carry you. You were heavy."

"Jiang Cheng, that's not a nice way to call yourself weak."

Wei Wuxian avoided the rock thrown at him by his martial brother, laughing as he launched himself in Lan Wangji's arms.

Jiang Cheng was enraged, "If I don't carry you, you'd probably stay in their ancestral hall and roll on the ground all day long. I don't have that thick of a face to lose! Lan Wangji even had fifty more strikes than you, and he even walked by himself. Yet, you have the nerve to pretend that you're crippled. I don't want to carry you any more. Get off, now!"

Wei Wuxian pouted and clung harder, "No, I'm wounded."

"Wow, I wouldn't be able to stand if I got struck 150 times!" A junior exclaimed.

Another piped in, "I think I would have just died to be honest."

“Hanguang-Jun is just *that* amazing, guys. Are you only realizing it now?” Lan Jingyi snorted, arms crossed over his chest.

The group walked into Lan Xichen who stopped and smiled, “What is going on, here?”

Nie Huaisang answered, “Xichen-ge, Wei-xiong was punished with more than a hundred strikes of the ruler. Is there any medicine?!”

“Was this done by Wangji? Is Young Master Wei still able to walk? What in the world happened?”

Tang Tang burst out giggling, “I wished Zewu-Jun had phrased that better.”

Fei Fei, who took a moment to understand, gasped when she realized. She slapped Tang Tang on the shoulder while smothering her own chuckles, “Not too loud, Tang Tang.”

However, their words had reached Nie Huaisang who snorted in agreement.

Jiang Cheng replied, “It’s fine, it’s fine; it’s not that serious! He can walk. Wei Wuxian, why are you still up there?!”

Wei Wuxian spoke, “I can’t walk.” He raised his red palms, which were swollen a few sizes larger, and complained to Lan Xichen, “Zewu-Jun, your younger brother is so cruel.”

Lan Wangji bowed his head as if in self-reflection and Wei Wuxian immediately said, “I don’t really mean that, Lan Zhan.”

“Mn.”

Lan Xichen examined his palms, “Yes, the punishment is quite severe, indeed. It is likely that the swelling will not subside until after three or four days.”

Jiang Cheng exclaimed, “What? Not after three or four days? His legs and his back were also hit by the discipline rulers. How can Lan Wangji do this?!” He spoke the last sentence with resentment and Wei Wuxian secretly smacked him for it. However, Lan Xichen continued to smile, “Nevertheless, it is not severe enough to require medication. Young Master Wei, let me tell you a way for your injuries to be healed in just a few hours.”

Lan Xichen released a small, “Ah.” When he had directed Wuxian to the cold springs back then, he had sincerely hoped that he and Wangji could make up and be friends. However if this led to some indecent acts happening while in their precious cold springs…

He gave his brother a side-glance to which Lan Wangji shook his head. Lan Xichen breathed a sigh of relief. Oh, thank goodness.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Cold Springs, Bunnies aaaaand maybe fighting with a Peacock?

Refinement VIII (2)

Chapter Notes

> okay I couldn't reach the peacock and bunnies scenes in this chap orz i didn't wanna rush writing them, so i'm saving them for next week! but at least we get the cold springs!!!
>
> And just a reminder, I follow the events of the novel more than any other adaptation (but I mix in dialogues and actions of the audio and manhua since they follow the same thing essentially), so any changes that the drama or the donghua did, I probably won't include them unless I feel they add to the storytelling. With that, enjoy this chapter!
>
> edited!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Senior Wei is going to the cold springs. Should we turn around?" A Gusu Lan junior inquired hesitantly. But Lan Jingyi just waved his hand.

"Nah, it should be fine if it's only one of them." Lan Jingyi said, crossing his arms, "Besides, they're our age, they won't do anything."

Several nodded their heads at this reasoning, while Jin Ling just scrunched his brows and continued watching the screen.

Lan Sizhui, on the other hand, had his hands over his eyes just in case.

The scene cut to the familiar Cloud Recesses' cold springs. In the lake was Lan Wangji who had his eyes closed in the ice-cold water.

Lan Jingyi stilled, his eyes eyes widening, "No—"

Then a voice not on screen rang out, "Lan Zhan!"

"..."

"AHHH! Hanguang-Jun is also there!"

"They're together!"

"They're naked!"

The juniors began covering their eyes in panic, their faces steaming hot with wild imaginations even though nothing was happening.

Lan Jingyi turned to Lan Sizhui and found him already covering his face, “Sizhui, did you already know?!”

If Lan Sizhui were any less proper, he might have rolled his eyes. Instead he blurted out, “No, I just had a feeling!”

Before Lan Jingyi could respond, Wei Wuxian grouched, “We didn’t do anything! Can you all stop acting like Lan Zhan and I do something indecent every time we’re in the cold springs?!”

The juniors had the grace to look sheepish. They slowly lowered their hands and raised their heads to watch. Jin Ling didn’t seem like he wanted to take any chances though as he still had his hands half-covering his face, eyes narrowed at the screen.

Nodding with a huff that they weren’t acting so scandalized anymore, Wei Wuxian leaned back against his husband. After a beat, he quietly said, “But you know, Lan Zhan, if you happen to have any fantasies about this day, we could check it out in the incense burner, what do you say?”

Lan Zhan released an amused breath but didn’t give his husband a reply. Though his mind did begin to wander...

Lan Wangji’s eyes sprang open. Wei Wuxian was lying on his stomach above the blue stones beside the cold spring, tilting his head and smiling at him.

Lan Wangji blurted out, “How did you come in?!”

People infatuated with Hanguang-Jun’s good looks began blushing over his exquisite form in the water. They couldn’t believe their luck that they’d get to see it a second time!

“How is it that his body already looks this good at that age?” A female cultivator said, ogling the sight of Hanguang-Jun’s toned torso.

“I feel like a cougar staring at Hanguang-Jun’s young body,” One whispered to her friend, the both of them giggling in embarrassment.

Unable to ignore it any longer, Wei Wuxian said aloud, “Then I hope you’ll feel better when I say Hanguang-Jun is already married and *off limits* .” The two paled at the glare he shot at them, too frightened of the Yiling Patriarch’s capabilities to say anything back.

Lan Wangji said nothing but he did run a hand down Wei Wuxian’s back, placating him.

Meanwhile, Tang Tang and Fei Fei silently began to slap each other, hitting any body part as their eyes stayed glued on the screen.

Wei Wuxian slowly crawled up, and spoke as he took off his sash belt, “Zewu-Jun told me to come in.”

Tang Tang had been in a state of hyper excitement earlier, and now she was shaking Fei Fei’s shoulder, “He’s taking it off, he’s taking it off!”

“I know, I know!” Fei Fei squealed back, biting a finger.

Lan Wangji asked, “What are you doing?”

He kicked off his boots while leaving piles of clothing all over the ground, “I already stripped, so what do you think I’m here for? Such a good place for healing wounds and you didn’t tell me, that’s not really nice of you!” He jumps into the water and shivers, “Eep! It’s really cold. Brr…”

"Oh…" The previous group of cultivators infatuated with Hanguang-Jun began to stare at the sight of a shirtless Wei Wuxian.

And then one of them broke the silence. "I don’t know if it’s just me but… he's not so bad either."

"You know if you just forget that he's the—"

"Yeah, yeah I get you. He’s totally gorgeous if we just forget the— mmhmm."

“Oh, thank the gods, I thought I was the only one.”

However, they broke their conversation when a frightening coldness began emanating from one of the cultivators— Lan Wangji to be exact.

His face was expressionless as always, but when he directed his gaze to them, they all shivered in fear and kept quiet.

Wei Wuxian sighed, oblivious to his husband’s vinegar, “Look at that body. I was so strong back then.”

Lan Wangji instantly focused his attention back on Wei Wuxian, holding the smaller male closer, “Wei Ying is still strong now.” He paused for a moment to think, then said, “And we have time.”

Wei Wuxian hummed in agreement, smiling at his husband fondly. Yes, he did have time now to rebuild his new body and return to the state that will help him continue spending the rest of his life with Hanguang-Jun.

He rolled about due to the freezing water of the spring. Lan Wangji quickly distanced himself a few meters away from Wei Wuxian, “I came here for cultivation purposes, not to heal… Do not leap around!”

Wei Wuxian complained, “But it’s so cold, it’s so cold…” He continued to jump about, a few splashes of water hitting Lan Wangji’s face.

He snapped. “Do not move!” Then, he extended an arm, and put his hand on Wei Wuxian’s shoulder.

Tang Tang was about to suffocate herself from trying to hold back her squealing. She could only purse her lips together in excitement and exchange glances with Fei Fei.

Wei Wuxian shifted closer over. Lan Wangji was wary of this, "What?"

Wei Wuxian replied in an innocent tone, "Nothing. It seems like your side is warmer."

Lan Wangji firmly kept his arm between the two of them, maintaining the distance. He sternly declared, "It is not."

Wei Wuxian was so amused at how much this Lan Zhan kept trying to distance himself from him, which was a great contrast to the way Lan Zhan acted around him now. He never would have thought that this teenage Lan Wangji already started having feelings for him then!

"Lan Zhan, imagine if I did press myself against you in the cold springs. What would you have done to me, hmm?" Wei Wuxian asked sneakily into Lan Wangji's ear, staring at him with hooded eyes. He watched as Lan Wangji breathed in deeply, seemingly to compose himself. Wei Wuxian wanted to snicker and throw himself in his husband's arms at the same time. Gah, he couldn't wait till they could get out of here.

Jiang Cheng eyed them suspiciously from where he sat a few meters away from them, "Wei Wuxian, you better be whispering child friendly things to Hanguang-Jun, or I swear I'm not going to be responsible if he pounces on you. I don't want you traumatizing Jin Ling when he's so young."

Lan Wangji shot him a frosty look while Wei Wuxian looked at his martial brother aghast, "We're not *that* shameless, Jiang Cheng!"

And Jin Ling added from among the juniors, "I'm not that young, Uncle!"

Ignoring his nephew, Sect Leader Jiang only sneered at the couple, "Could have fooled me."

He would never forget the time he visited Cloud Recesses for important Sect Leader duties (not because he came to check on Wei Wuxian, of course not) only to stumble upon Lan Wangji pushing Wei Wuxian against a tree and making out with him. For a long time.

That was an image he never needed in his head!

Wei Wuxian glanced at Lan Wangji's palms and shoulder. He spoke sincerely, "Lan Zhan, I admire you so much. You really did punish yourself as well, without treating yourself any better. I don't have anything else to say."

Lan Wangji shut his eyes again without any words.

Wei Wuxian spoke again, "Really, I've never seen someone as prim and proper as you. It'd be impossible for me to do something like this. You're so cool."

Lan Wangji still paid him no attention. Wei Wuxian asked him if he knew he was complimenting him but Lan Wangji only questioned his intentions. He admitted that he wanted them to be friends since he thinks they're close already, but Lan Wangji denied it with a resound, "We are not."

Wei Wuxian turned to his husband and scrutinized him, “But really Lan Zhan, you actually liked that I was complimenting you and calling you my friend, right?”

Lan Wangji was silent for a moment, before saying, “...In a way.”

“In a way?” Wei Wuxian repeated, wilting a little with a pout.

But then Lan Wangji continued, “I wanted to be friends with Wei Ying but I did not think what I felt at that time was… friendly.”

Wei Wuxian fought back the urge to chuckle as he thought, ‘Ah, Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan, you’re too cute.’

Wei Wuxian slapped the surface of the water, “Now, you’re being boring again. Really. There are lots of benefits if you become friends with me.”

“For example?”

Wei Wuxian swam near the edge of the spring, and leaned back with his arms on the blue rocks, “I’m always really loyal towards my friends. For example, I’d definitely let you be the first person to look at new porn that I get hold of… Hey, hey, come back! It’s fine if you don’t look at them.”

Jiang Cheng rolled his eyes, “Is it always porn with you?”

“I was a growing kid! Leave me alone, Jiang Cheng,” Wei Wuxian scowled. “Don’t act like you never looked over my shoulder whenever me and Huaisang read them.”

“You—!” Jiang Cheng darted a glance at Jin Ling who was looking interestedly at their conversation, and his face grew red. He said defensively through gritted teeth, “I was young.”

“Oh, where did I hear that argument from just now, hmm?” Wei Wuxian acted like he was thinking about it, before laughing when Jiang Cheng turned his head away and ignored him.

“Have you been to Yunmeng? Yunmeng is really fun. Yunmeng’s food is also good. I don’t know if it’s Gusu’s or the Cloud Recess’ problem, but the food in your sect is terrible. If you come to Lotus Pier, you can eat lots of delicious food. I can take you to pick lotus seed pods and water chestnuts. Lan Zhan, do you wanna come?”

“No.”

Wei Wuxian’s smile dimmed slightly, seeing himself talk about a Lotus Pier that was once his home. He really did wish he managed to take Lan Zhan around when Lotus Pier was still standing in the way that he knew it, before all the blood, death and tears shed it away.

Lan Wangji held his hand, understanding his husband’s thoughts. He thought maybe he should share with Wei Wuxian his trip to a lotus pond once when he wanted to try picking seed pods because the other had mentioned it to him back then. Deep inside, he knew he'd done it because he had missed Wei Wuxian in Gusu.

Wei Wuxian said, “You shouldn’t always answer everything with ‘not’. You sound so uncaring, girls won’t like it. Let me tell you—the girls in Yunmeng look very pretty, different from the sort of pretty in Gusu.” He winked at Lan Zhan, “You sure you don’t wanna come?”

Fei Fei rolled her eyes, "Oh Hanguang-Jun wouldn't even look at them but you, Wei Wuxian."

Tang Tang nodded, "True. Very true."

Lan Wangji hesitated, but still replied, “No…”

Wei Wuxian shook his head and slapped his own forehead, "What was I thinking trying to entice you with the girls? What if you ended up falling in love with one of them because of me?!"

Lan Wangji resolutely said, "That would never happen." He gripped Wei Ying's hand tighter and added, "Only you."

Wei Wuxian blushed, and he couldn't look at his husband as he murmured, "Gosh, Lan Zhan, why do you have to be so—" *perfect, amazing, the best thing to ever happen in my life.*

Wei Wuxian continued, “Rejecting me without giving me any respect—aren’t you scared that I’d take away your clothes when I leave?”

Lan Wangji snapped, “Get lost!!!”

Lan Xichen had to chuckle, ashamed of himself for even thinking that his brother would act indecent with Wuxian when they were still at this level of friendship back then. It was really too adorable to be honest. He was glad Wangji was more upfront with his feelings now.

Even the juniors were amused, relieved that it was just some simple flirting from Wei Wuxian's end.

Ouyang Zizhen sighed, "Ah, the pining. I can already see the start of a beautiful relationship."

Jin Ling looked at him strangely, "How in the world are you seeing that? All I see is a disaster waiting to happen. Much like Jingyi."

"Hey!"

Lan Sizhui interjected, "You'll see. Hanguang-Jun and Senior Wei are just that couple who are meant to be together." He turned his head to smile at the pair lost in their own world as usual.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Bunnies and Peacock or so help me 😤 this chapter is just so long and filled with so many reactions that i can't help but keep dividing the chapter, sorry! XD

UPDATE: new chapter will be up on Monday instead!!! Apologies for the delay 😫

Refinement VIII (3)

Chapter Notes

it's finally here!!!! sorry for the delay orz

edited!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Hi,” A meek voice addressed Tang Tang and Fei Fei who turned their heads to find a small woman sitting close to them.

“Uh, could I-I join you?” She asked.

Tang Tang tilted her head curiously while smiling at the girl, “Of course. There’s a lot of space here.” She gestured around her and Fei Fei.

But then, the girl shook her head and clarified, “I mean,” she darted her eyes meaningfully to Hanguang-Jun and Wei Wuxian who were sitting by the front, before she tried again, a blush staining her cheeks, “Join you in… talking about *them* .”

Fei Fei was still confused but Tang Tang had caught on immediately. She reached over and grabbed the woman’s hands, her eyes bright, “You’re talking about Hanguang-Jun and Wei Wuxian right?”

The new girl enthusiastically nodded, “Yes. My heart raced so much watching them in the cold springs.”

Fei Fei giggled into her hand while Tang Tang cackled, “This is only the beginning, my little friend. What more do you think they did when they’ve grown up?”

They exchanged wide grins and Fei Fei asked, "What's your name?"

"My courtesy name is Liu Jiali.” She bowed her head shyly.

Tang Tang grinned, “Then we’ll call you Li Li. Is that alright?”

Liu Jiali’s eyes widened before a smile spread across her round face, “Yes, I’d like that.”

Lan Qiren gave Wei Wuxian a harsh scolding in front of everyone when he returned to Gusu. It was basically about how he had never seen someone so unruly and shameless before, so please get lost, as soon and as far as possible. Please don’t go near the other pupils, and especially refrain from tainting his favorite one—Lan Wangji.

Several of the juniors couldn't help but laugh quietly this time. They were no longer scared of the Grand Master's lecture and were much more amused at seeing the exasperation wrought on every line of the old man's face. He was acting like a potter trying to protect a very important vase from being damaged, not knowing that there was already a crack inside.

Wei Wuxian just grinned while listening, and after Lan Qiren left, Wei Wuxian spoke to Jiang Cheng, "Don't you think it's a bit too late telling me to get lost now? I already finished tainting his favorite person before he told me to get lost. It's-too-late~"

Lan Qiren's face had grown dark, realizing this to be true already. The moment Wangji had caught Wei Wuxian trying to sneak in liquor from the rooftops, his nephew had already fallen, just like how his own brother had…

He inwardly sighed, wondering why his brother and nephew just had to be so similar in matters of love.

Meanwhile, Wei Wuxian was grinning like he was proud of himself, clutching at Lan Wangji's arm, "And I'm not sorry about it."

A small smile was present on Lan Wangji's face. He was glad that he'd been 'tainted' early on as well, since he could now have this beautiful being in his life.

In a far corner of the cave, before Tang Tang or Fei Fei could make appropriate reactions, Li Li released a choked laugh until she managed to muffle it with her palm, her face even redder than before.

Tang Tang blinked at her in surprise before she laughed, giving her a thumbs up, "Yup, you're definitely one of us."

The scene then changed to Wei Wuxian walking with a group of seven or eight people. As they passed the Lan Sect's Library Pavilion, he could see Lan Wangji sitting alone by the window.

Nie Huaisang wondered why Lan Wangji was looking at them when they didn't even make any sound. Wei Wuxian replied, "He's probably thinking of how to find faults with us."

"Am I right?" Wei Wuxian smiled smugly at his husband.

Lan Wangji slightly tilted his head, but then said, "Mm. In addition, …you were there."

"Lan Zhan~!" Wei Wuxian had to cover his face on Lan Wangji's shoulder, feeling too giddy that he felt like he might burst with it. He was weak whenever Lan Wangji admitted that he'd been looking at Wei Wuxian since a long time ago.

Jiang Cheng was this close to moving several seats away from them. He didn't need this amount of dog-food up close and personal.

Jiang Cheng interrupted, "Wrong. Not 'us', but 'me'. I think the only person he's watching is you."

"The first time I'm actually agreeing to Sect Leader Jiang's words." Tang Tang commented.

Fei Fei snorted beside her while Li Li released a small giggle.

“Heh. Just let him wait. I’ll deal with him after I get back.”

Jiang Cheng, “Didn’t you dislike how he’s boring and not fun? Then, you should stop teasing him. This is like pulling whiskers from a tiger’s mouth—stop courting your own death.”

Wei Wuxian had to rush to cover Lan Wangji’s ears as he looked affront at Jiang Cheng.

“What?!” Jiang Cheng asked, confused, “Those were your own words.”

“But Lan Zhan doesn’t need to hear them.” Wei Wuxian pouted, then turned to Lan Wangji when he pulled Wei Wuxian’s hands down.

He was about to say something when Lan Wangji spoke first, “It’s fine. I know.”

“But you’re not boring or not fun at all, Lan Zhan! Well, maybe in the past you were but that’s why it was super fun to tease you. I like how you are now though.” Wei Wuxian said, rubbing his husband’s hands that were bigger than his.

Lan Wangji felt his heart jump at that and he wished he could hold Wei Wuxian closer in a hug or pull him on his lap, but their current situation was not the appropriate setting for it. He had to satisfy himself with squeezing Wei Wuxian’s hands gently, gazing at the man he loves with fond eyes.

Meanwhile, the ignored Jiang Cheng shut his eyes as he muttered, “Heavens, save me.”

Wei Wuxian replied, “Wrong. It’s precisely because of how much a living person can be so boring to that extent. That’s what truly makes it so fun.”

“It’s like pulling the hair pins from a girl’s hair.” Ouyang Zizhen said wisely with a slow nod.

Jin Ling frowned, “What girl?”

“It’s a metaphor. He means when someone’s trying to get the attention of the person they like by annoying them as much as they can.” Lan Jingyi answered.

“But doesn’t that just make the person angry? How in the world will that make them fall for you?”

“Ah Jin Ling,” Lan Jingyi sighed, like a master reacting to his dumb student.

Ouyang Zizhen patted Jin Ling’s shoulder, “There’s still much for you to learn on the matters of love, Jin Ling.”

Jin Ling sneered, “Why the hell do you two act like you know it all already? We’re around the same age.”

“Experts never reveal their secrets.” Lan Jingyi wagged his finger at Jin Ling’s annoyed face.

But Lan Sizhui piped up, “They like to read things inappropriate in the Cloud Recesses.”

Lan Jingyi turned to his friend, feeling betrayed while Jin Ling had a look of revelation on his face.

The sun on the screen showed that it’s noon as Lan Wangji still sat before the desk, organizing his stacks of paper. He heard a creaking noise coming from the window, and looked up to see Wei Wuxian hopping inside.

His face was beaming, “Lan Zhan, I’m back! How’s it been? Without me copying books here for the past few days, did you miss me?”

“Of course, you did.” Wei Wuxian smirked, whispering into Hanguang-Jun’s red ear, “Why else did you have such dreams about me in the library?” He was tempted to say more but Wei Wuxian didn’t want to eat his words if either one of them did end up pouncing on the other. He wasn’t going to let Jiang Cheng be right!

Lan Wangji continued to organize the pile of books with a numb expression. Wei Wuxian deliberately misinterpreted his silence, “I know, even if you don’t say it, that you definitely missed me. Or else, earlier on, why did you look at me through the window?”

Lan Wangji immediately shot him a glance. Wei Wuxian sat atop the windowsill, “Look at you, rising to the bait after just a few sentences. You’re so easy to catch. This way, you won’t be able to maintain your composure.”

Fei Fei chuckled, “I love it when he flirts like this to Hanguang-Jun.”

“I *know.* It’s so cute.” Li Li agreed.

Tang Tang added, “Makes you wonder if Hanguang-Jun ever thought of pinning Wei Wuxian down and shutting him up… with something else aside from the Gusu Lan spell.”

The girls gasped, their imaginations left running in certain directions.

“You, leave.”

Wei Wuxian countered, “If I don’t leave, will you throw me down?”

Their jaws dropped as Tang Tang, Fei Fei and Li Li exchanged excited glances.

Wei Wuxian quickly added, “Don’t be so scary! I’m here to apologize by giving you a present.”

Lan Wangji refused at once, “No.”

“Are you sure?” Wei Wuxian fished out two rabbits from his arms.

Lan Sizhui’s eyes widened, his mind connecting the dots quickly.

He lifted them in front of Lan Wangji's eyes, "It's actually quite strange here. There aren't any pheasants, but there are lots of wild rabbits. They aren't even scared of people. What do you think? Aren't they fat? Do you want them?"

Lan Wangji stared at him indifferently.

Wei Wuxian said, "Fine. If you don't want them, I'm gonna give them to other people. We aren't having much flavors in our mouths, anyways."

The Gusu Lan disciples gasped at the implications of Wei Wuxian's words.

"You… you never ate one of our rabbits, right?" A junior had to ask.

Wei Wuxian snorted and crossed his arms, "Why would I ever do that? I gave them as a gift to Lan Zhan after all."

It was then when several pieces began to click in their minds as they thought about the bunch of rabbits hidden in the back garden of their sect. The Gusu Lan juniors were beginning to see just how much or how *long* their Hanguang-Jun had loved Wei Wuxian.

Lan Wangji spoke, "Stop."

Wei Wuxian extended his arms, "I'm not going anywhere."

"Who are you giving them to?"

Wei Wuxian answered, "I'm gonna give them to whoever's good at roasting rabbit meat."

Several murmurs of "but killing is forbidden in the Cloud Recesses," rang out in the cave.

Lan Wangji said, "Killing is forbidden in the Cloud Recesses. It is the third rule on the Wall of Rules."

Jin Ling rolled his eyes when the Gusu Lan juniors around him blushed for saying practically the same thing as Hanguang-Jun. 'You'd think they had learned a new cultivation method or something.'

Wei Wuxian sighed, "Fine, then. I'll go down the mountain, kill it outside, and then bring it back to roast it. You don't want it, anyway, so why do you care so much about it?"

Lan Wangji spoke one word at a time, "Give. It. To. me."

Wei Wuxian grinned on the windowsill, "Now you want it? Look at you—you're always like this."

Lan Xichen had to sigh for his brother. Wuxian practically had him wrapped around his finger already and even though Wangji knew it, he was still going along with Wuxian's tricks. It was kind of cute to watch, honestly, and it let him understand better how much his brother had fallen in love with the man known as Yiling Patriarch.

He placed the rabbits on the table where one of them just continued chewing on grass while the other hopped about.

“Ah the rabbits are so cute.” A female cultivator cooed.

“One of them is even black, while the other is white.” Another noticed.

“It’s Hanguang-Jun and Senior Wei, ah!” One of the juniors said this time. However, he choked on his words when the next scene happened.

Wei Wuxian suddenly called, “Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan!”

“What?”

Wei Wuxian pointed, “Look at how one is on top of the other… Are they…?”

The previous junior placed a shocked hand on his mouth while his fellow disciple laughed at him.

On the other hand, Tang Tang was quietly exclaiming, “It’s foreshadowing the future!”

Fei Fei wondered, “So you’re saying they’re going to… go at it like rabbits?”

“Oh gods,” Li Li said, her eyes wide and cheeks red.

“Well, when you say it like that…” Tang Tang said, not disagreeing at all.

Lan Wangji exclaimed, “Both of these are male!”

Wei Wuxian was puzzled, “Male? How weird.” He lifted them by the ears, examined them, and confirmed, “They really are male. Well, then, I didn’t even finish my sentence. Why are you so stern? What were you thinking of? Now that I think about it, I was the one who caught them, and I didn’t even notice whether they are male or female, but you even looked at their…”

Lan Wangji finally threw him down the Library Pavilion.

Wei Wuxian laughed while in midair, “Hahahahahahahahahahahahahaha!”

Chuckles filled the cave as the cultivators grew amused at the boys antics together. Some of them wished it had stayed that way, with Wei Wuxian innocently teasing Lan Wangji and acting like the kid he is, instead of ending up as the Yiling Patriarch and slaughtering thousands of souls.

Jiang Cheng shook his head, “You had that coming for you.”

“What? I really didn’t notice!” Wei Wuxian laughed, patting his husband who had grown red in the ears again.

With a bang, Lan Wangji slammed the window close, and stumbled back to the desk.

Lan Wangji swept a look at the messy piles of rice paper and ink pawprints on the ground, as well as the two white rabbits rolling around while dragging pieces of lettuce leaves. He closed his eyes and covered his ears, but he couldn't shut out Wei Wuxian's vibrant and unrestrained laughter.

"Aww, did you dislike my laughter before?" Wei Wuxian asked.

Lan Wangji shook his head and thought of how to explain it, "The silence in my life was filled with your presence." He paused and slowly continued, "It is loud but also bright and I didn't know how to face it at the time."

Then he kissed Wei Wuxian's knuckles and murmured, "Now I do."

Wei Wuxian had basically turned into a puddle of goo as he sighed, "Lan Zhan, you have such a way with words. If you waxed poetics about me every night, I wouldn't be able to handle it."

Lan Wangji hummed a brief, "Mm," thinking about it.

The scene that the screen showed next was a long wall in the Cloud Recesses, displaying different designs that represented their history.

Wei Wuxian laughed, "So, the founder of the Lan Sect was a monk—no wonder! He ventured into the mortal world to meet one person, and, wherever she went, he followed, leaving nothing behind on this Earth. But why would a person like him produce such unromantic descendants?"

Nie Huaisang was unable to stop himself from laughing, "Wei-xiong, this is clearly slapping yourself on the face considering who you married in the end."

Wei Wuxian groaned, "I know, I know. Why did this have to remind me that I said something like that?" He moved to face Lan Wangji with a frown, "Your family definitely are Lan An's descendants, Lan Zhan. You're the most romantic person I know."

Lan Wangji smiled as he caressed the side of Wei Wuxian's face, "Mm."

Wei Wuxian heard a group of boys chatting as someone asked, "Zixuan-xiong, who do you think is the best girl?"

Wei Wuxian and Jiang Cheng both looked toward a boy in the front rows of the classroom.

Jiang Cheng and Wei Wuxian froze, suddenly remembering this moment while Jin Ling sat more attentively, his eyes on the screen.

Another person spoke, "It's best for you to not ask Zixuan-xiong about this. He's already got a fiancee, so his answer would definitely be his fiancee."

"Jin Ling," Wei Wuxian said, at the same time as Jiang Cheng went, "A-Ling."

The boy turned his head to them, a curious frown on his face that looked so much like his father's.

When Jiang Cheng didn't know where to begin, Wei Wuxian stepped in, "The next parts… may not be something you'd like to see."

"Just close your eyes and ears for a moment." Jiang Cheng added which only made Jin Ling more confused.

"What? But m-my father is—"

Wei Wuxian cut in, "Remember when I said we weren't friends with your father in the past? Well, it has to do with something he says… about your mother."

Jin Ling's eyes widened, his gaze darting between him and Jiang Cheng. "My mother?"

"You have to understand that your father was young here, Jin Ling." Wei Wuxian explained, "And he said some things that weren't nice. Honestly, he wasn't my favorite person before, but he got better when he grew up."

Jiang Cheng released a frustrated breath, "You don't need to have the image of your father ruined by watching this A-Ling, so just do as I say and turn around."

But after a few seconds, Jin Ling's brows furrowed and he said, "But what if I want to know?"

"A-Ling!"

"Uncle," Jin Ling hurriedly spoke, a determined expression on his face, "I appreciate what you're trying to stop me from seeing but I-I want to know… everything about family. Every little thing, even if they're not nice things."

Jiang Cheng didn't look like he was going to agree but Wei Wuxian caught his eye and shook his head. They couldn't stop Jin Ling when he wanted to see more of his parents.

Jin Zixuan's lips seemed to twitch, showing a slight expression of displeasure. The disciple obliviously continued with a cheerful face, "Really? Which sect is she from? She must be extremely talented!"

Jian Zixuan raised a brow, "Forget it."

Even though Jin Ling had readied himself for anything, he couldn't stop his muscles from tensing, his insides churning as he looked at the displeasure on his father's young face.

Wei Wuxian suddenly spoke, "What do you mean by 'forget it'?"

Everyone in the room looked at him with surprise. Jiang Cheng sat beside him with a dark face.

Jin Zixuan spoke in an arrogant tone, "Is the phrase 'forget it' too difficult to understand?"

Wei Wuxian smiled sardonically, "The phrase isn't hard to understand. Instead, it's hard to understand how on Earth you are unsatisfied with my shijie."

Lan Jingyi, Lan Sizhui and the rest of the juniors began to realize where this was going and they were sending pitying and sympathetic looks at Jin Ling who continued to watch.

The older cultivators who had only remembered Jin Zixuan at his best had almost forgotten the kind of spoiled boy he was at that age.

The other cultivators started whispering to one another.

"What? Jin Zixuan's fiancee is Jiang Yanli of the Yunmeng Jiang sect?"

"With Jin Zixuan's circumstances, it's true that it's a bit unsuitable."

"That's not true." Wei Wuxian stated, for Jin Ling's sake, "They were perfect together. Jin Zixuan was just being a--" He struggled to think of a word that wasn't a curse to describe the man.

"Brat." Hanguang-Jun offered and Wei Wuxian turned to his husband in surprise.

He chuckled a little as he agreed, "Yes, that."

Jin Ling frowned, having been called a brat one too many times by his uncles too.

"It's all because her mother and Jin Zixuan's mother come from sects that were close to each other's so the two madams played together ever since. They had a good relationship…"

Wei Wuxian stopped Jiang Cheng from coming at Jin Zixuan asked as the guy replied, "Why don't you ask me how in the world I could be satisfied with her?"

Jin Ling's breath hitched, his fingers clutching at the folds of his robes. He never knew that his father had viewed his mother like this before… How did they ever fall in love and get together?

Jiang Cheng instantly stood up, but Wei Wuxian walked in front of him and sneered, "You sure think that you're pretty satisfying, don't you? Where did you get the guts to be all choosy here?"

Jin Zixuan blurted, "If she's unsatisfied, then tell her to get rid of this engagement! In conclusion, I don't care for your shijie. If you care for her, ask her father about it! Doesn't he treat you better than treating his own child or something?"

Wei Wuxian closed his eyes and sighed, unable to feel anything but sorrow and regret every time he looked at Jin Zixuan's face.

Meanwhile, a handful of cultivators were thinking that this was the moment when Wei Wuxian had set his grudge against Jin Zixuan and never forgave him. It was no wonder he later killed the man.

Wen Ning was a silent viewer, his eyes seeming to hold a mournful gaze.

Wei Wuxian rushed over and threw a punch. Jin Zixuan immediately struck back without speaking a word, and they were only broken apart by an older Gusu Lan disciple.

Looking at Jin Ling's bowed head, Lan Sizhui carefully said, "Jin Ling, you have to know that sometimes, relationships don't always start off on the right foot."

"That's right," Ouyang Zizhen picked up with a smile, "Just look at Hanguang-Jun and Senior Wei, didn't you say you never understood why Hanguang-Jun would ever fall for someone as annoying as Senior Wei?"

Jin Ling slowly raised his head, his eyes a little red but he seemed to be listening. Lan Jingyi interjected, "Your parents were probably like them too. Then one of them, probably your father, finally realized what a catch your mother was and fell in love with her."

"I heard they loved each other very much." Jin Ling finally said, the sadness in his eyes slowly disappearing.

"And they did." Jiang Cheng confirmed, having come over to pat Jin Ling on the shoulder. The juniors silently moved away as Jiang Cheng crouched beside Jin Ling, looking at him with a soft gaze that Jin Ling hadn't seen since he was young, "And they loved you very much too. Jin Zixuan was just blind then but he came to his senses eventually. Don't take anything he says to heart, you understand A-Ling?"

Jin Ling nodded, a bit dumbstruck seeing this side of his uncle. He couldn't remember when was the last time his uncle had ever comforted him like this.

"Wow, it's been a while since I last saw Cheng Cheng act like a father." Yu Nianzhen commented as Jiang Cheng returned to his previous spot.

"Shut it." He said, though there was no bite to it. It had felt a little awkward saying those words to Jin Ling but he wasn't about to let his nephew stew in whatever negative thoughts he had about his father when he knew the brat had always seen him as a role model.

Even Wei Wuxian had to smile at the effort Jiang Cheng made. At least he knew Jin Ling had been in safe hands over the years with Jiang Cheng there to take care of him.

Chapter End Notes

i love my junior squad ;w;

Next chapter: back to the present!!!

See you next sunday~

Refinement VIII - Contentment I

Chapter Notes

the struggle to think of reactions is real haha some updates it comes easy, but sometimes it doesn't. today is that day ;w;

edited!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jiang Fengmian and Jin Guangshan hastened to Gusu and after a series of scenes which showed the two sect leaders seeing the two who were punished to kneel and receive a severe scolding from Lan Qiren, they wiped some sweat from their foreheads and started to engage in small talk.

“Wow, are those the two previous Sect Leaders of the Jiang and Jin clan before Jiang Wanyin and Jin Guangyao?” A junior exclaimed to the rest, his eyes wide at seeing such legendary figures ~~in high resolution~~.

Jin Ling’s jaw dropped. It was his two grandfathers that he had never seen in his life. He darted his eyes back and forth between them, not sure who he should focus more on.

On the other hand, Wei Wuxian had stiffened beside Lan Wangji while Jiang Cheng’s eyes had widened, his hand twitching like he wished to reach into the screen and grab hold of the man in purple robes. Even though the both of them had mentally prepared themselves to see the dead alive again, it was still a struggle not to react emotionally when Jiang Fengmian looked so young and full of life in front of them.

Jiang Fengmian soon brought up the idea of cancelling the engagement.

He told Jin Guangshan, “A-Li’s mother was the one who insisted on having this engagement, in the first place, and I didn’t agree. Looking at it now, as neither of them are keen, it’s best if we don’t force it.”

"They planned on breaking the engagement?" Jin Ling asked, surprised. His mother and father’s relationship was really that terrible in the past?

“Don’t worry, Jin Ling, things obviously turned out for the better later on.” Lan Sizhui comforted, patting Jin Ling on the shoulder.

“Yeah,” Lan Jingyi interjected, “Otherwise, you wouldn’t be here.”

Lan Sizhui just sighed at Jingyi’s lack of tact while Jin Ling shot Lan Jingyi a disdainful look, his face turning beet red.

Jin Guangshan was shocked. He responded, "What do the children know? They can play around however they want to. Fengmian-xiong, you and I don't need to pay them any attention."

Many cultivators frowned at the sight of Jin Guangshan, this disgusting man who died from the hands of a son who was just as horrible as him. Wei Wuxian curled his lips too, reminded of the times Jin Guangshan had purposely annoyed him in his previous life. He probably disliked him more than Jin Guangyao, which was saying something.

"Ugh, are we going to have to see this man and his horrendous acts of 'good deeds' again?" Wei Wuxian grumbled to his husband who didn't seem so enthused either, judging by the slight pinch of his lips but there was no helping it. They were all forced into this watching situation after all.

The only thing Wei Wuxian was looking forward to was seeing Shijie again, even if it meant reopening a wound that hadn't fully healed at the thought of her death. He just wanted to see her again, see her smile, even if it was just through this enchanted screen.

Jiang Fengmian replied, "Jin-xiong, although we can set the engagement for them, we can't carry out the marriage in place of them. After all, they are the ones who will be spending the rest of their lives together."

'You mean the rest of their lives in the afterlife now,' Sect Leader Yao thought, frowning over the image of Jiang Fengmian who had once helped his sect from peril. What a good man wasted away by those damn Wen dogs. Now it was no thanks to Wei Wuxian and the Ghost General that Fengmian's daughter and her husband couldn't even live happily together.

After some consideration, Jin Guangshan agreed to this matter.

The scene shifted to Lan Wangji walking down the hallway before he paused and turned his head to where Wei Wuxian was still kneeling on the stone path. His shoulders were trembling and Lan Wangji, believing that he was crying, walked over and said, "Wei Ying,"

But when he saw that Wei Wuxian was only playing with an ant hill, his face changed darkly.

"Look, Lan Zhan! So many black ants." Wei Wuxian tried showing him with a stick but Lan Wangji flicked his sleeve and harshly said, "Unteachable," before walking away.

Wei Wuxian's mood lifted when he noticed teenager Lan Wangji being worried for him.

"I should have faked cried instead so I could have had Lan Zhan wrapping his strong arms around me and holding me to his chest." Wei Wuxian sighed regretfully.

But Lan Wangji went, "I might have pushed you away."

"Lan Zhan!" Wei Wuxian whined, pouting at his husband's teasing remark.

Wei Wuxian was still there when Jiang Cheng approached with a sneer on his face, "Look at how well-behaved you are, kneeling so properly."

Wei Wuxian gloated, "Of course, I kneel all the time. But Jin Zixuan is a spoiled brat, so he's definitely never knelt before. If I don't make him kneel to the point that he cries for his parents, my last name won't be Wei anymore. It's fortunate that you didn't hit him."

Jiang Cheng rubbed his knuckles, "I was going to. If you didn't push me, the other side of Jin Zixuan's face would also be ruined."

Wei Wuxian, "Nah. He looks uglier right now with an asymmetrical face. I heard that he values his face as much as a peacock. I wonder what he'll think after he looks into a mirror! Hahahaha…"

Jin Ling didn't know how to feel about Wei Wuxian insulting his father so much, though he felt that maybe his father did deserve it for insulting his mother. His uncle and Wei Wuxian were only protecting their sister's image. But he wished his father could turn over a new leaf and prove himself to be the compassionate and brave man Jin Ling knew him to be.

After rolling on the ground with laughter, Wei Wuxian spoke again, "Actually, I should have let you hit him, while I just watched on the side. This way, maybe Uncle Jiang wouldn't have come. But there was no choice. I couldn't help it!"

Jiang Cheng humphed lightly, "You wish."

As Wei Wuxian saw his melancholy face, he thought that he was still annoyed at Jin Zixuan's words.

Hearing Wei Wuxian's thoughts, Jiang Cheng couldn't help but mentally comment, 'oblivious Wei Wuxian as usual.' It was probably a miracle that Wei Wuxian wasn't too perceptive at that age because Jiang Cheng didn't need his martial brother's pity over his family issues.

"You should go. You don't need to stay with me. If you have time, go visit Jin Zixuan and look at how idiotic he looks kneeling down. If Lan Wangji comes again, you'll be caught by him."

Jiang Cheng was surprised, "Lan Wangji? Why did he come? He still dared to come see you?"

Wei Wuxian replied, "Yeah, I also thought that he should be praised for having the courage to come see me. He was probably told by his uncle to come check if I was kneeling properly."

"Then were you kneeling properly?"

Wei Wuxian told him the story and Jiang Cheng sighed, "You should get lost and go back to Yunmeng as soon as possible! I don't think he'd ever want to see you again."

"Shows what you know, Jiang Cheng," Wei Wuxian stuck his tongue out at his martial brother who ground his teeth and retorted.

"How the fuck was I supposed to know that he was in love with you already?"

Instead of Wei Wuxian, it was Nie Huaisang who answered behind his fan, "Maybe if you observed them more, Jiang-xiong."

Jiang Cheng turned to him with a frown, "Don't tell me *you* already knew?"

Nie Huaisang shook his head with a laugh, "Not Hanguang-Jun's feelings, no. But I could tell Wei-xiong was definitely infatuated with him."

Wei Wuxian opened his mouth to say it wasn't like that— he never even knew his actions could be interpreted that way!—before deciding to drop it. He didn't mind if people thought he was in love with Lan Zhan back then; what mattered was that he was definitely in love with the man now.

They are shown a brief glimpse of Wei Wuxian packing up his things before leaving Cloud Recesses with Jiang Fengmian.

"Were you sad when I was gone, Lan Zhan?" Wei Wuxian scratched under his husband's chin, grinning coquettishly.

Lan Wangji set those golden eyes on him as Wei Wuxian waited, then Lan Wangji nodded the tiniest bit and it sent Wei Wuxian into a giddy mess. He threw his arms around Lan Zhan with a happy smile, "I thought that you forgot about me already!"

"Wei Ying is hard to forget." Lan Zhan's words only served to tighten the hold around his shoulders.

Meanwhile, a certain group of girls were currently sighing in regret that they would have to see their favorite couple separated.

Just as everyone thought they'd see Wei Wuxian returning to Lotus Pier, the clouds and skies started changing again in Cloud Recesses, moving in the opposite direction from the previous scene that showed a similar pattern.

When it stopped, the scene opened to Wei Wuxian in Mo Xuanyu's body sleeping haphazardly on the bed while snoring away. Someone whose hands were only shown on screen fixed Wei Wuxian's posture and tucked him securely under the blankets. It wasn't hard to guess who that was when the next shot showed Lan Wangji leaving the jingshi.

The first to react was none other than Tang Tang who was brimming with excitement, "Oh my gods, oh my gods, that was Hanguang-Jun taking care of Wei Wuxian!"

"We're back to the present!" Fei Fei wiped away her fake tears, while Li Li clapped happily to herself.

The cultivators were surprised too and began talking amongst themselves. Wei Wuxian felt almost disoriented seeing Mo Xuanyu's body now after watching his original body again for so long. He almost missed it…

Then something occurred to Wei Wuxian and he slumped in disappointment. "Awww, we almost got to see Shijie."

Lan Wangji rubbed his back comfortingly as he said, “Maybe later.” By that, he meant another reveal of the past and Wei Wuxian nodded, hoping there would be more.

When he opened his eyes, Wei Wuxian immediately took off the blanket that covered him. He dug the fingers of his right hand into his hair, while feeling strange all over.

At this time, two knocks came from the jingshi’s wooden door with Lan Sizhui’s voice calling out, “Young Master Mo? Have you risen yet?”

Wei Wuxian complained as he sat up, “Why are you calling me so early in the morning?!”

“E-early? … But, it’s already nine.”

“I’m glad I don’t have to wake up at the same time as you Lan disciples,” Wei Wuxian said, “But the only downside is that I don’t get to wake up to Lan Zhan’s beautiful face every morning.” He hadn’t deliberately lowered his voice when he said it which got a lot of the juniors blushing to the roots.

Because he laid on his front for half the night, his waist and back were both aching. He spoke in an honest tone, “I can’t get up.”

Lan Sizhui asked, “Uhm, what is wrong, this time?”

Wei Wuxian blurted out shamelessly, “What is wrong? I got done by your sect’s Hanguang-Jun.”

Ouyang Zizhen had to swiftly change his laughing to coughs when he felt his father’s steely gaze on the back of his head. The other juniors weren’t faring any better either.

“Oh my,” Nie Huaisang too had to cover his face with a fan, too amused with Wei Wuxian’s act.

However, Tang Tang and the girls were beside themselves with joy, giggling like crazy old witches.

Lan Jingyi’s angry voice also appeared, “If you continue to speak nonsense like this, you will pay for it. Come out!”

Wei Wuxian spoke as if he had been wronged, “Really! He did me for the whole night! I can’t go out. I don’t have the face to see anyone.”

Lan Zhan was barely phased by this amount of shamelessness from his husband already, but hearing him act like this towards the juniors left him sighing.

“Ah! I’m sorry, A-Yuan!” Wei Wuxian exclaimed, “You know I was only joking, right?”

“Of course, Senior Wei.” Sizhui bowed his head in respect while inwardly thinking about the deep cleansing he had to put his mind through to forget Senior Wei’s words.

“Hey, why are you only apologizing to Sizhui,” Lan Jingyi piped up indignantly, “My ears didn’t need to hear that either!”

“I apologize for hurting your delicate sensibilities, Jingyi.”

“I forgi— wait, what did you say?!”

Lan Jingyi had to be held back as he raged, “You have no shame at all! Hanguang-Jun is not a cut sleeve. He did you?! I would be more than grateful if you tell me that you did not do him. Get up! Take away that donkey of yours and train it properly. It makes so much noise!”

Wei Wuxian laughed out loud as he asked a red-faced Lan Jingyi, “Would you like to take back any of that?”

Lan Jingyi hadn’t bowed in a while so he did it now after standing up, directing it both to Wei Wuxian and Hanguang-Jun, “I apologize, Hanguang-Jun, Senior Wei for speaking out of turn. It wasn’t my place to assume that Hanguang-Jun wasn’t a cut sleeve.”

Lan Wangji nodded in acceptance. Lan Jingyi went back to his seat while exhaling heavily in relief.

“Would Wangji still be considered a cut sleeve if he only likes one person?” Lan Xichen asked out of the blue, seeming to be curious about this.

Wei Wuxian blinked before thinking about it. “Lan Zhan, have you ever been attracted to anyone else aside from me?”

“No,” came Lan Wangji’s immediate response.

“... Lan Zhan.” Wei Wuxian sniffled, touched for some reason.

“Wei Ying,” Hanguang-Jun replied softly, eyes only on his beautiful husband.

Lan Xichen turned away from the two and decided this was a question he’d just answer himself.

Chapter End Notes

let's help xichen answer his question! XD

Next chapter: LWJ and WWX’s duet!

UPDATE: SORRY!! looks like it's another Monday update 😩

Contentment I

Chapter Notes

> i have no excuse for the delay other than the fact that the intro took me an entire day to write 😅 orz hope you enjoyed this chapter!
>
> warning: homophobia bcos this was going to happen eventually with all these conservative pricks around….

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The older cultivators who were not used to Wei Wuxian's shamelessness were red in the face, completely beside themselves in indignation. How could one openly speak of such things, especially to disciples so young? One of them could not hold his silence any longer and he voiced his opinion quite loudly in the cave, "How revolting. The Yiling Patriarch really is as indecent as the rumors say he is."

His companion with a pointy beard nodded hastily, "You're right, Sect Leader Yang. Just imagine how this kind of behavior would affect the younger disciples of Gusu Lan."

"Exactly." Sect Leader Yang grumbled with a loud huff. "If we weren't trapped in here, I would have left with my sect a long time ago. I don't care to hear about the Yiling Patriarch's obscene ways."

With one person voicing his thoughts, it created an opening for those of the same mind to share their opinions too.

Sect Leader Yao couldn't help but jump in, "I never understood why cultivators want to be cut sleeves. What kind of fool wants to suppress their cultivation like that?"

"They can't dual cultivate for one." Another interjected as if he thought cut sleeves were missing out. "And doing it with another man is just…" His face clearly showed how unnatural he thought that was.

Sect Leader Yang responded high-handedly. "There needs to be harmony in the copulation of two bodies. Only the balance between man and woman can strengthen a cultivator's spiritual powers and help increase their cultivation. Unless cut sleeves decide to abandon their years of training to indulge in the carnal pleasure of the bodies instead."

There were murmurs of "Ridiculous," and "Repulsive" bouncing off the cave walls after that.

Wei Wuxian had to forcefully hold Lan Wangji's wrist when his husband looked ready to stand and cut them down with Bichen. The grip on his sword was so tight his knuckles were

turning white.

Instead, Wei Wuxian spoke up without turning to look at them, “That may be true, Sect Leader Yang. Dual cultivation does indeed need a balance, one with Yin and the other with Yang. It’s a good thing then that I’m filled with plenty of Yin energy as a master of demonic cultivation after all.”

“Preposterous,” was Sect Leader Yang’s instant response, even though his expression looked as if he’d swallowed a lemon.

Wei Wuxian shrugged. “I’m not going to convince you, but I’d appreciate it if you could keep your prejudice about cut sleeves to yourself.”

Sect Leader Yang’s mouth twitched as he sneered, “And if I don’t? Are you going to silence me when you’re just as powerless as everyone else here?”

“Who said I was powerless?” Wei Wuxian snarked back, finally turning around to smirk at him. He raised a hand to reveal a wisp of black smoke swirling on the palm of his hand.

This brought about a reaction that Wei Wuxian had expected once he exposed this. Countless swords were unsheathed and pointed at Wei Wuxian, while Hanguang-Jun smoothly stood up and stepped in front of his husband, blocking their hostile glares with his own incredibly frosty one. It took Wei Wuxian slightly by surprise to see a few people who had previously opposed him, not standing up and joining in on the stand-off.

One shouted, “So it is you! There’s no use denying it now, Wei Wuxian. Why else would you be the only one capable of using your demonic cultivation while we’re all trapped here with no spiritual powers?”

“I don’t know.” Wei Wuxian said, even though it was a huge lie. But he wasn’t going to tell a stranger that he didn’t have a golden core anymore. His answer seemed to have stumped the cultivator for the moment which made Wei Wuxian grin, “But the fact that I had my cultivation the entire time and you’re all still alive must mean something, hmm?”

Wei Wuxian didn’t exactly have high hopes for any of them to understand that he really had nothing to do with this. But all of sudden, a junior spoke up to his defense, “Yeah, Senior Wei won’t do anything bad. We’ve been here for a while already and Senior Wei hasn't done anything harmful to us.”

He was followed by his martial brother, “I agree, and I think it’s better if we don’t fight in here.”

"Is it that big of a deal to fight about?"

“Can we all just get back to watching already?”

“I second that.”

It seemed that being stuck inside a cave with everyone for so long had made the juniors braver in speaking their minds. In addition, they’d probably grown fed up hearing the same

drivel over and over again and had just wanted it to stop.

Wei Wuxian internally snorted. If he could hug all of these little brats without these annoying cultivators watching, he would.

The older cultivators sputtered at the juniors' words, looking as if they weren't going to have it, and things probably would have gone a lot messier had Lan Xichen not stepped in and diplomatically eased the tension in the room. The Sect Leaders and cultivators took their seats back on the floor with grumbled reluctance, but they still kept their swords close at hand.

Lan Wangji wasn't easily appeased either, and he kept Wei Wuxian to his side with an arm around him. Wei Wuxian smiled and snuggled in, feeling his chest warm at his husband's protective gestures.

Wei Wuxian quickly climbed up, "What did you do to my Lil' Apple?! Don't touch it. It's quite good at kicking."

Lan Jingyi asked, "What is Lil' Apple?"

"My donkey!"

"I miss Lil' Apple." Wei Wuxian commented with a sigh. Even though that donkey had given him hard times, he'd been there to carry Wei Wuxian around when he was alone.

Lan Jingyi grimaced, "I don't." The farther he was away from the donkey's braying, the better.

Wei Wuxian shooed the juniors to take him to his mount. He was led to a field of grass where the donkey was crying nonstop and making a lot of noise.

Wei Wuxian was delighted, "There are so many rabbits! Come, come, let's put them on a stick and start roasting!"

Wei Wuxian groaned and rubbed his face against Lan Wangji's shoulder, feeling regretful now for saying he'd roast the precious rabbits that he'd gifted to Lan Wangji.

Lan Jingyi fumed with anger, "Killing is forbidden in the Cloud Recesses! Make it shut up, right now. The disciples doing early readings have already come to ask a few times! If this keeps up, we will be scolded to death!"

"Have some patience, won't you? Lil' Apple is only braying because he's hungry," Wei Wuxian fed it the apple that was given to him for breakfast. Wei Wuxian stroked the back of its neck as he thought about the passage tokens on these juniors and pointed at the round rabbits all over the ground, "I really can't roast them? If I roast them, would I be chased off the mountain?"

Lan Jingyi hastily blocked in front of Wei Wuxian with his arms stretched wide, "These are Hanguang-Jun's. We just occasionally help him look after them. Don't you dare roast them!"

“Didn’t you know you liked rabbits so much, Jingyi.” Jin Ling commented with a snort.

Lan Jingyi huffed, “It was for the sake of Hanguang-Jun! He loves them.”

“I’m sure Senior Wei was just kidding around when he said that,” Lan Sizhui smiled. He felt it kind of special now that he knew the rabbits came from Senior Wei and Hanguang-Jun had always brought him over there to play around when he was little.

“A good thing Lan Jingyi was there to protect your bunnies from me, right Lan Zhan?” Wei Wuxian snickered, while elbowing his husband who didn’t move an inch.

Wei Wuxian laughed so hard that he almost fell on the ground. He thought, ‘What an interesting person Lan Zhan is! In the past, he refused to accept them when I gave them out for free, but now, he secretly raised a whole bunch. And he was saying he didn’t want them? Who was he kidding? Oh please, I bet he actually likes this sort of white, fluffy things. Hanguang-Jun, holding a rabbit while keeping up a straight face. My gosh, I’m gonna die…’

Lan Wangji watched the Wei Wuxian on screen covering his face as his shoulders trembled from laughter. Wei Ying really had no idea how much his actions in the past had impacted Lan Wangji’s life. He did eventually grew to like taking care of those rabbits but after Wei Ying’s death, those rabbits had become a source of solace for him when Lan Wangji wanted to remember the good times with Wei Ying. It was the same when he’d be around A-Yuan or when he’d unearth the mementos he’d collected from Wei Ying over the years.

Wei Wuxian nodded along to his thoughts, “Yes, you like rabbits so much Lan Zhan, you even confessed about it while drunk, remember?”

Lan Wangji went silent, obviously wanting to remember but couldn’t. Wei Wuxian couldn’t help but smile as he lightly pinched at his husband’s cheeks.

“Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan~. If you weren’t taken already, I’d have you all to myself.” Wei Wuxian sighed as he draped himself against Lan Wangji who supported his body with a hand on the curve of his waist.

Lan Wangji’s golden eyes swept over him as if he thought Wei Wuxian was mentally ill, “We are already married, Wei Ying.”

Wei Wuxian gasped, “You’re right! It’s so nice to be reminded of it every once in a while, you know?” The demonic cultivator got what he wanted when Lan Zhan’s lips curled up ever so lightly on the side and heard him respond with his signature ‘Mm’. Wei Wuxian could kiss him right now if only it wouldn’t send Lan Qiren to an early Qi deviation.

A cultivator, who’d been single for a long time, pouted at the lovey-dovey sight in front of him. He wished he had his own cultivator husband to snuggle up to in public.

Suddenly, rings of the bell came from the western side of the Cloud Recesses.

“What’s wrong? I’ve never heard of such violent bell strikes in Gusu before.” Wei Wuxian asked but then Lan Jingyi and Lan Sizhui both began dashing toward the Mingshi at once.

Wei Wuxian quickly followed.

Outside of the watchtower, more and more of the Lan Sect's disciples started to crowd around, but nobody dared to go in. Seeing that Lan Wangji didn't appear, Wei Wuxian had a foreboding feeling.

"I know this isn't really an appropriate moment to say it but Wei Wuxian thought of Lan Wangji first in times of danger… " Tang Tang placed a hand over her chest as if the feelings were too much for her. Fei Fei nodded in agreement.

"When you're in love, it just takes over every part of you." Li Li said with a dreamy sigh.

When Wei Wuxian asked why anyone wasn't going in, Lan Sizhui explained that the doors to the Mingshi could only be opened from the inside. It's not only difficult to open but it's forbidden to do so as well.

"Wow, what's happening in the Cloud Recesses?" A disciple asked in wonder.

"It looks like Gusu Lan sect are having a hard time subduing Chifeng-Zun's hand." Liu Dazhong, previously Brother Liu, explained.

"Oh, I almost forgot! I thought a bunch of corpses invaded the sect or something." The disciple rubbed the back of his neck sheepishly.

Liu Dazhong was unfazed as he replied, "It is the only explanation given the little that we know of the story."

Suddenly, the black doors burst open with a bang. A white-clothed disciple rushed outside and stumbled. He rolled down the stairs and the door of the mingshi instantly closed again

The bystanders quickly helped the disciple up. But he immediately fell down again, his face covered in tears beyond his control. He held onto the people around him, "We should have… shouldn't have summoned…"

Wei Wuxian grabbed his hand at once, speaking in a low voice, "Which spirit are you trying to summon? Who else is inside? Where's Hanguang-Jun?!"

Lan Xichen's brows furrowed in worry, concerned and secretly scolding himself for leaving the other disciples and elders behind. He should have stayed to help with the summoning, instead of seeing Jin Guangyao for no other reason than to hang out with him.

He breathed in slowly when the image of that man popped into his head, before Lan Xichen managed to calm his slowly raging emotions and continued watching.

It seemed as if the disciple had trouble breathing, "Hanguang-Jun told me to run away…"

Before he finished his sentence, dark-red blood gushed out of his nose and mouth. Wei Wuxian pushed him to Lan Sizhui's arms, then he went up the stairs in just a few strides. He kicked the Mingshi's doors and commanded, "Open!"

The door opened abruptly and Wei Wuxian entered in a flash, before the door closed right behind him.

Lan Qiren couldn't help the small sound of surprise that escaped him when he saw the Mingshi's doors opening to let Wei Wuxian in. Was the boy really that powerful to be able to enter the Mingshi like this. Or did he get help from…?

Lan Qiren stared hard at his nephew's impassive expression before deciding against it. It was better not to know.

Meanwhile, Wei Wuxian had his own theories too as he whispered them to a red-eared Lan Wangji, while holding onto his knee.

A few disciples followed him in shock, but the door couldn't be opened again. A guest disciple rushed at the door, shock and anger on his face as he blurted out, "Who on earth was that person?!"

"Wei Wuxian, the Yiling Patriarch!" Wei Wuxian smugly proclaimed with his hand in the air.

"No one asked." Jiang Cheng scoffed with a shake of his head.

Wei Wuxian quickly replied, "But he did," pointing to the disciple on screen. Said disciple was now hunching his shoulders, hiding in the pack of juniors sitting together as he hoped not to get called out for punishment.

Lan Sizhui held the earlier disciple up and spoke through clenched teeth, "… Come help me first. He's bleeding!"

In the Mingshi, Wei Wuxian saw a few people lying motionless on the ground, while the arm was set in the center of the array on the ground, releasing a lot of dark energy.

Lan Wangji was the only one still playing his guqin. Since Lan Wangji's face was always placid, Wei Wuxian had no idea what he was thinking about. Lan Qiren now lay collapsed and unconscious on the side, bleeding like the disciple who escaped earlier. Wei Wuxian then stood directly across Lan Wangji and pulled the bamboo flute from his waist to play.

Suddenly, Wei Wuxian gasped as if he realized something, "It's our first duet, Lan Zhan!"

Lan Wangji nodded.

Lan Wangji met his gaze, a look of understanding on his face. As he raised his right hand, a melody poured out from the guqin. Wei Wuxian quickly joined with the flute, and the song that they played was "Evocation". But the song almost ended, and there was no spirit being summoned.

The sense of suppression in the air felt heavier. Wei Wuxian was secretly shocked, as he thought 'it was almost impossible that the spirit couldn't be summoned with Lan Wangji and me playing "Evocation" together, unless… unless the dead person's soul was cut apart alongside his corpse!'

Since "Evocation" didn't work, Lan Wangji's fingers shifted, and started playing another tune. This song had a calm melody and it was called "Rest." Wei Wuxian purposely played it with many mistakes and short breaths of air. Lan Wangji had probably never played with someone with such terrible skills before.

As expected, several of the disciples in Gusu Lan cringed as the dreadful melody reached their sensitive ears. Their faces displayed varying forms of horror to wanting death.

"Now I'm glad we weren't in there at all."

"Yeah. I think I might have started a fight with Senior Wei."

"Hanguang-Jun would never let you." The junior said with a snicker.

After a while, Lan Wangji finally couldn't bear to continue any longer, and raised his head to look at Wei Wuxian with an expressionless face.

Wei Wuxian pretended that he didn't see anything, his tune venturing even more off. However, he was shocked to find Lan Qiren actually sitting upright again. He pointed at Wei Wuxian with a trembling hand, his face covered in blood and rage, and shouted in a hoarse voice, "Stop playing! Get out! Get out now! Stop…"

Before he could finish, he spat out a mouthful of blood, and sank into a deep coma yet again.

Wei Wuxian gaped while Lan Wangji was speechless.

Nie Huaisang could not be more thankful for his collection of fans since it helped him cover up his obvious laughter. Lan Qiren fainting over Wei Wuxian's bad flute playing was just too hilarious. He wished he could see it again on loop.

There were a few other cultivators trying to hold it in as well: Jiang Cheng had to look over his shoulder and cough discreetly into his hand, while Lan Xichen had a smile that looked brighter and more amused than before.

Lan Qiren was the only one who didn't look too happy at all.

Chapter End Notes

honestly might start thinking of changing schedules since i can't sleep late on Sundays anymore lol

Next chapter: the start of Wangxian's journey together!!!

UPDATE: i've been planning on a new schedule now and this week just got me so busy i couldn't finish the new chap sdjflskj so hopefully i can give you guys an update either Monday or Tuesday and announce the new schedule then too!!~

Contentment I-II

Chapter Notes

> i'm tentatively changing my schedule to early sundays for ppl living in asia or late saturdays for those in the west (since i was posting at early mondays and late sundays before)…. If i manage to post three chapters successfully in that schedule, then i'll stick to it haha
>
> which means i will be posting another chapter tomorrow bcos i gotta make up for not updating on schedule this week XD;;;

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lan Qiren's nose flared as he exhaled. He could only vaguely remember saying those words at the time. If he had been more conscious, he would have stopped Wei Wuxian playing that infernal racket right then and there! Who cares if he was doing it on purpose to hide his identity! Music like that should be banned in the Cloud Recesses; in fact, it was!

And the damn brat even did it while playing alongside Wangji… oh… the horror.

'Our guqin and flute duet actually angered Lan Qiren so much that he woke up and fainted again.' Wei Wuxian thought in amusement as the cursed hand dropped gradually.

"I hope our fellow cultivators can remember themselves. We should show more deference and respect to our Esteemed elders." Lan Xichen stated, reminding the others to tone down their amusement. The juniors all hastily removed the gleam in their eyes, and Nie Huaisang looked away sheepishly, his fan hiding his face. Jiang Cheng acted as if he'd done nothing at all.

As much as he appreciated it, Lan Qiren would like to ask his nephew, 'Did you think I did not notice how your smile grew brighter earlier? You actually enjoyed seeing this uncle of yours faint. Where was your filial piety then??'

Lan Qiren took deep breaths once more and mentally recited the Gusu Lan rules, 'Do not hold grudges, Do not succumb to rage…'

The doors of the Mingshi sprung open and all of the disciples flooded in, calling out "Hanguang-Jun."

Lan Wangji walked over to check Lan Qiren's pulse. Everybody began to help pick up their older seniors' bodies and treat them, but they couldn't cure them.

Wei Wuxian stuck the bamboo flute back beside his waist. He suddenly noticed the downcast expression on Lan Sizhui's face, "What's wrong?"

Lan Sizhui spoke in a low voice, "It is just that I feel slightly guilty." When Wei Wuxian was confused, he admitted that he thought the hand was coming for them.

Lan Jingyi turned to Lan Sizhui in surprise, while the other just gave him a meek smile.

"Now you know it's not your fault, Sizhui." Wei Wuxian said, then pointed to himself, "As what Brother Liu Dazhong mentioned before, the hand was there because of me."

Lan Sizhui nodded, "I know now, Senior Wei."

"It's still a question of who did it though." Jiang Cheng commented, his brows furrowed in thought.

Wei Wuxian waved a flippant hand. "You'll see."

Jiang Cheng looked at him in disbelief. "You already know who did it?! Why didn't you say anything?"

Laughing awkwardly, Wei Wuxian shrugged. "I only have a guess, no solid evidence yet."

"But when were your guesses ever wrong." Jiang Cheng snorted, which was a compliment coming from him.

Wei Wuxian shook his head, his smile slipping to something sad. "It's happened."

Wei Wuxian smiled, "How do you know?"

Lan Sizhui explained that if the hand had been there before them, then Mo Village would have already been slaughtered. Someone must have purposely set the hand there with ill intentions when the Gusu Lan disciples arrived.

Wei Wuxian responded, "Your academics are quite strong. That was some good analysis."

"Look at how good A-Yuan is. I didn't even know it was him before, but I could already tell he'd make a great cultivator when he grows up. You really taught him well, Lan Zhan!" Wei Wuxian grinned, turning to his husband who looked back at him with a tiny smile.

Lan Wangji nodded, "Sizhui is good."

Hearing their conversation, Lan Jingyi stated proudly to the inquiring gazes of the juniors, "It's true. Sizhui was taught personally by Hanguang-Jun like his own son."

"Woah, really?"

"That's amazing!"

"No wonder Sizhui is so strong."

Lan Sizhui blushed under all of the attention, and hastily said, "No, no. I still have a long way to go."

Ouyang Zizhen sniffed in a fake manner, “And look at him being so humble too.” He began to cry on Lan Jingyi’s shoulder while Jingyi patted him on the head. Jin Ling rolled his eyes at the dramatic pair, but his lips were twitching in amusement.

Lan Sizhui lowered his head, “If so, for the lives lost at Mo Village, we should… we should also be responsible. And, now, we also involved Lan Qiren and the others in this matter…”

After a while of silence, Wei Wuxian patted his shoulder, “The one responsible shouldn’t be you guys, but the person who sent out the ghost hand. In this world, there are some things impossible for one to control.”

Nie Huaisang slowed the movement of his fanning, and thought to himself, ‘Should I feel regret over the deaths of worthless, horrible people? They should be honored that they at least served *some* purpose before dying.’

He simply hummed and continued fanning himself, watching the screen with contemplative eyes.

On the other side, Lan Wangji removed his hand and the others asked, “Hanguang-Jun, how is it?”

Lan Wangji replied that they needed to trace it to its source and Wei Wuxian agreed to find the full corpse of the hand. Lan Jingyi interjected that it would be difficult to find it if the spirit-summoning didn’t work. However, Lan Wangji simply said, “The northwest.”

Lan Sizhui wondered, “The northwest? Hanguang-Jun, why is it the northwest?”

Wei Wuxian said, “Hasn’t it already been shown to you guys?”

Lan Jingyi was puzzled, “Shown to me? Who? Who showed it? Hanguang-Jun did not.”

“Wow, did I really look that stupid?” Lan Jingyi clicked his tongue at his screen-self. The sword was right behind him!

“You look stupid all the time. I see no difference.” Jin Ling countered without thought.

Lan Jingyi smiled sickly sweet at the golden-robed boy, “Young Mistress, you better watch out when you do something stupid next.”

“Jingyi.” Sizhui said, reminding him not to act too unruly with their elders around. But Jin Ling was already provoked.

“When did I ever act stupid?”

Lan Jingyi snorted, not deigning to give him an answer. And also because Sizhui was giving him warning looks already.

Wei Wuxian spoke, “It.” He gestured to the ghost hand that was steadily pointing at one direction. They were all shocked. Lan Jingyi stammered, “It? What… What is it pointing towards?!”

Wei Wuxian replied that it's either the other parts of its corpse, or the murderer who made him this way. A few boys who stood in the northwestern direction quickly shuffled aside. Giving him a look, Lan Wangji slowly rose, speaking to the disciples, "Take care of Uncle properly."

"What's with that look, Hanguang-Jun? I wasn't wrong." Wei Wuxian pouted.

Lan Wangji hummed, "Not wrong. Just not in front of the disciples."

Wei Wuxian sighed. "Your sect needs to learn to stop babying them, Lan Zhan, or else how will they grow to be as smart and capable as you?" He had to chuckle when Lan Wangji gave him the same look as him on screen.

A few nodded, "Okay! Are you going to travel down the mountain?"

Lan Wangji gave a slight nod. Wei Wuxian stealthily shifted behind him, talking to himself in a loud, cheerful way, "Yes, yes, yes, we can finally get off this mountain and elope together!"

Tang Tang, Fei Fei and Li Li silently cheered with him!

"Oh, I hope this shows their wedding." Fei Fei suddenly said, her hands clasped together against her chest.

Tang Tang's eyes widened, "I haven't even thought that far yet. Oh heavens, I do hope so now!"

Li Li sighed sadly though, "That's still going to take awhile though, isn't it?"

"Ah, you're right…"

The expressions of the older disciples were scary, but a few of the boys were already used to it. Lan Qiren's face seemed to twitch again, as he lay unconscious on the ground. The disciples thought, 'if he spoke a few more sentences, maybe Grandmaster Lan would be angered awake again…'

Wei Wuxian burst out laughing. He didn't know the Gusu Lan Sect juniors could have a sense of humor, and a funny one too! Meanwhile, the disciples present in that moment trembled where they sat. When they snuck a glance at Lan Qiren, they found that a vein was throbbing on his neck as if he were suppressing lecturing them right then and there. The disciples gulped. 'Please have mercy on us, Grandmaster! We didn't know that these thoughts could be shown so freely to everyone.'

Suddenly, several people began to wonder if there was a cultivation technique out there that could block one's mind from being read or recorded.

Lan Wangji only took Wei Wuxian to this expedition. He watched him as closely as possible because Wei Wuxian tried to sneak away multiple times, only to fail with Lan Wangji carrying him back with one hand holding the back of his collar.

"Hahaha, Senior Wei really wanted to escape so bad."

“Nobody could slip through Hanguang-Jun’s sight.”

Jiang Cheng tsked as he watched another one of Wei Wuxian’s failed attempts, “A window, Wei Wuxian? Really? I thought you knew better than that.”

Scowling as if he’d been personally attacked, Wei Wuxian sullenly replied, “Those were one of my last resorts. I swear it’s like Hanguang-Jun just knows when I’m about to leave!”

“Maybe you just weren’t trying hard enough.”

Wei Wuxian was ready to refute, then thought about it and slowly closed his mouth. That might… have been the case too. He wasn’t too sure yet. Lan Wangji just had this sort of gravity that made people so inexplicably drawn to him. Whether it’d be good or bad ones. Or maybe that was just Wei Wuxian’s bias thinking.

Wei Wuxian changed strategies and began to stick to Lan Wangji as hard as he could instead. At night, he would persistently climb into Lan Wangji’s bed, with the intention that Lan Wangji would become disgusted and use his sword to throw him away.

Tang Tang rolled her eyes with a scoff, “Like Hanguang-Jun would ever do that.”

Fei Fei nodded enthusiastically, “I’m sure he’s enjoying having Wei Wuxian all to himself at night.” She snickered.

Then Li Li interjected, “But I feel like it’s also kind of pitiful for Hanguang-Jun.”

“Pitiful?” Tang Tang asked.

Li Li hurriedly tried to explain, “W-Well, if you love someone so much, but the other person doesn’t know and he keep doing things like what Wei Wuxian is doing, especially if Hanguang-Jun understands why he’s doing them… then it’s just a huge struggle trying to contain himself. Ah, I don’t know!” She covered her face afterwards, but Tang Tang and Fei Fei hurriedly reassured her.

But whenever Wei Wuxian wriggled into his blankets, Lan Wangji would make Wei Wuxian’s body go rigid with a light tap. Then he would stuff him into the other set of blankets in a proper position, where Wei Wuxian would remain until daylight broke. Wei Wuxian suffered a ton of losses and complained about his sore body after he woke up.

The juniors were back to covering their eyes over Hanguang-Jun and Senior Wei’s bedroom matters. Even though nothing indecent happened, the imagery of Wei Wuxian crawling under Lan Wangji’s blankets was just too much for their pure, virgin hearts.

Wei Wuxian frowned as he watched himself acting so shamelessly to Lan Wangji. Heavens, what could have gone through Lan Wangji’s head while he did all of this to the man? After knowing how passionate of a person Lan Zhan was now, Wei Wuxian was amazed he hadn’t been pinned down to the bed yet.

Wei Wuxian couldn’t help but think, ‘Now that he grew up, he also became less fun than before. In the past, he would become shy whenever he was teased, not to mention that he did

it in quite an amusing way. But now, not only does he remain unmovable no matter what, he even learned how to counterattack. How can this be?!'

Lan Wangji inwardly answered that he no longer wanted to be that foolish boy who'd been too hesitant and too late to save the one he loved.

"That's what you call karma." Jiang Cheng input helpfully.

Wei Wuxian huffed. "If it's Lan Zhan, then I don't mind. I like this side of him too." He smiled up at Lan Zhan's beautiful face and sighed, "Especially in bed, Jiang Cheng, he's *so* domi—"

"I don't want to hear it!" Jiang Cheng cried out, clamping hands over his ears while glaring fiercely at a cackling Wei Wuxian.

Chapter End Notes

half the reason why i couldn't get started on this chapter was bcos it was so boring sobs. And by that I mean, there weren't any moments where i could make interesting reactions from orz (every chapter of mdzs is beautiful, i dare not curse this beloved story XD)

I've doomed myself to writing the reactions for the entirety of mdzs and I pray that my motivation will last till the end haha i really appreciate all the love and i hope yall can stick with me through this gigantic project!!! ＼(*T▽T*)／

Next chapter: Wei Wuxian is scared of dogs 🤭

See you tomorrow~

Contentment II

Chapter Notes

> thanks for the lovely encouraging words last chap ;w; and also for the suggestions. I'll keep them in mind mwah!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The two went northwest and duetted Rest every single day to temporarily calm the arm's anger and killing intent. The hand formed into a fist as they traveled to Qinghe which meant that what it was pointing at was just around the area.

Wei Wuxian was trotting behind Lan Wangji when he suddenly cringed and blurted out to a charlatan, "What are you selling? How does it smell like this?"

He wore the robes of a cultivator and was selling a few items to passerbys. He winningly told Wei Wuxian that he was selling rouge and powder for a cheap price. Wei Wuxian took a look.

Wei Wuxian scoffed, "It's this guy again." He touched his chin with a contemplative look. "I wonder if he remembered to draw me prettier now."

The charlatan spoke, "For your wife?"

Wei Wuxian gave him a grin, "For myself."

"..." The charlatan's smile froze, thinking to himself, 'Are you joking with me?'

Wei Wuxian sprawled over Lan Wangji's lap as he laughed, "I knew he was thinking that when I asked!"

"Why the hell would you buy rouge and powder?" Jiang Cheng asked, giving Wei Wuxian an odd look.

His martial brother sat up and returned it with his own, "Why? You think my handsome face won't look good with them?"

Jiang Cheng rolled his eyes, "Even with a new face, you're still as vain as ever."

Wei Wuxian puffed out his chest, "Although my previous body is still the best, Mo Xuanyu's isn't so bad either. Definitely enough to pass as the handsome Hanguang-Jun's husband."

Lan Wangji let out the smallest sighs, "Wei Ying."

"Yes, husband?"

Wei Wuxian batted his eyelashes to Hanguang-Jun who was looking at him as if he didn't know whether to smile or scold Wei Ying.

Lan Wangji turned around and came over. He spoke with an emotionless face, "Do not bother others if you are not going to buy it."

Recognizing the Lan Sect's sect motif, the charlatan didn't dare cause trouble and ran away while carrying his chest. Wei Wuxian called after him, "What are you running away for? I really wanted to buy it!"

Lan Wangji spoke, "Do you have the money?"

"Yes, yours." Fei Fei said jokingly to the girls who giggled along with her. She was, of course, referring to them sharing finances in the future.

Wei Wuxian replied, "If I don't, you can give me money." He stretched out his hand and searched inside Lan Wangji's robes. He didn't expect to actually find anything, but after a few moments, he found a delicate pouch with money in it.

Tang Tang burst out laughing, and smacked Fei Fei who was gaping at the screen. Li Li just squealed at the fact that Wei Wuxian had basically groped Lan Wangji's chest.

Seeing the familiar money pouch, Wei Wuxian had to chuckle. 'Ah, Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan, you always give me reasons to love you more.' He felt like he'd never be able to realize the full magnitude of Lan Wangji's devotion, but Wei Wuxian had time. He was going to make up for all the years they'd been apart and spend hundreds— no, thousands more years together.

'This didn't seem like something Lan Wangji would carry around at all.' Wei Wuxian thought as he took the pouch at once. 'As expected, I can take anything from Lan Wangji if I want to, without the other becoming dissatisfied at all. If it keeps going on like this, I might even suspect that he and Mo XuanYu had been involved in some helpless, chaotic entanglement of a relationship. Or else, why would Lan Wangji be able to endure it, after I've already gone through such lengths?!'

Wei Wuxian turned and looked to Lan Wangji who was still standing in the same spot, looking at his direction.

"Senior Wei, wha— how— are you serious?!" Ouyang Zizhen couldn't contain it any longer and burst out.

"Zizhen." His father rebuked, eyeing Wei Wuxian warily for his reaction.

But Wei Wuxian was looking at Lan Wangji with a pout, telling him, "Ignore my thoughts, Lan Zhan. I didn't mean them. I know you didn't have any strange entanglements with anyone."

"Mm."

"I was just confused and thought you kept treating me so nicely because I was Mo Xuanyu."

“Mm.”

“Are you angry?”

“...No.”

“You are! You are angry, Lan Zhan!” Wei Wuxian whined, about this close to crawl onto his husband’s lap and sweetly charm him with apologies, until Lan Zhan had enough and kissed him.

Ah, if only.

Then someone on the side shouted, “The Yiling Patriarch, five coins for one, ten coins for three!”

Wei Wuxian wondered who it was, only to find out it was the fake cultivator again. He now held a stack of paper that had someone even more malicious-looking than door-gods drawn on them. He proudly showed off that these pictures of the Yiling Patriarch could ward off evil demons.

“Wow, anybody who’d believe that is stupid.” Lan Jingyi said with arms crossed over his chest.

Some low-leveled cultivators, who *did* buy them and heard his words, flushed in embarrassment, but they wisely did not say a word.

Jin Ling perked up, “Hey, I’m almost here again!”

Wei Wuxian told him he was shamelessly boating, and that it’s not effective if it could only be sold for five coins. The charlatan was disgruntled at his presence and told him not to buy if he kept showing up.

Wei Wuxian flipped through the stack of “The Yiling Patriarch’s Evil-Suppressing Portraits” and looked horrified.

The moment Lan Jingyi went “pffft” at the sight of the badly drawn paintings of Wei Wuxian, a scatter of laughter could be heard from the juniors, and even some of the older cultivators as well.

Wei Wuxian glared at all of them, his expression sullen.

Wei Wuxian argued, “Wei Wuxian was a man famous far and wide for his good looks. What is this that you’ve drawn?! If you haven’t seen the actual person, then don’t draw anything. You’re gonna mislead the younger generation.”

The junior disciples nodded. A lot of them thought the Yiling Patriarch was some ugly, vicious looking old man until they saw Wei Wuxian's past.

Lan Sizhui smiled. He'd been skeptical about believing those, since the stories he’d heard from Hanguang-Jun spoke of a man who sounded charming and handsome.

Someone suddenly attacked from behind and only Wei Wuxian dodged to the side.

The charlatan was unfortunately thrown off, crashing into a pinwheel stand beside the street. The scene was a jumble. The charlatan wanted to curse, but as he saw it was Jin Ling, his imposing attitude immediately dropped. He asked feebly, "Why did you kick me?"

Crossing his arms, Jin Ling spoke coldly, "Kick you? Anyone who dares to mention the words "Wei Wuxian" in front of me should be kneeling in gratitude if I don't kill them. Yet, you're shouting right in the middle of the streets. Do you want to die?!"

Jiang Cheng frowned at the scene and looked at Jin Ling who was cringing at his past-self. He knew it was his fault for encouraging that sort of behavior to his nephew, his own hate for Wei Wuxian blinding him and influencing the kid.

"So do you still hate Senior Wei?" Lan Jingyi asked teasingly.

Jin Ling scowled, his cheeks growing red as he stuttered, "I-I-… Shut up!"

Wei Wuxian thought, 'I wonder how this child's personality turned out this way— spoiled, arrogant and headstrong. He learned all of his uncle and father's faults, but none of his mother's strengths. If I don't do some tinkering with him, he'd definitely suffer great losses in the future.'

"What?!" Two people instantly voiced their displeasure as they turned their heads to Wei Wuxian.

Jin Ling threw aside his embarrassment and exclaimed, "Who are you calling spoiled, arrogant and headstrong?"

"So A-Ling needs to learn from you to remove my faults, huh?" Jiang Cheng sneered, "How righteous of you, Wei Wuxian, as if you were ever the model of a humble and good cultivator growing up."

Wei Wuxian palmed his forehead, ignoring them as he exhaled in exasperation, "When will my thoughts just stay as thoughts?"

Wei Wuxian interrupted, "Jin Ling!"

The charlatan didn't dare to make a sound, but his eyes were full of appreciation. Jin Ling turned to Wei Wuxian with contempt and argued with him got a bit. Then Jin Ling blew a short whistle.

The heavy huffs and puffs of some sort of beast came from afar. As Wei Wuxian turned around to look, a black-furred spiritual dog dashed straight at him. The cries of fear on the street came closer and closer, louder and louder, "A mad dog's on the loose!"

Wei Wuxian went rigid in his seat, before he dived behind Lan Wangji and held onto his broad shoulders. Even though he knew Fairy wasn't with them now, he couldn't help but feel scared just from seeing the sight of a dog and hearing it's growls of death!

With an immediate change in his face, Wei Wuxian fled as fast as he could.

"Senior Wei, are you—?" Just as Ouyang Zizhen turned his head, he found Wei Wuxian already hiding behind Hanguang-Jun, who looked like he was ready to fight an invisible foe.

The juniors fell silent, not knowing how to process the fact that the big, bad Yiling Patriarch was afraid of dogs.

Even the older cultivators were stumped, unsure if Wei Wuxian was playing a trick on them or not. How could someone so powerful and immoral be scared of a little animal?

When Wei Wuxian saw a tall, white figure, he quickly shouted at the top of his lungs, "Lan Zhan, save me!"

Wei Wuxian was still clutching at Lan Wangji's shoulders as he sighed in relief, "Thank goodness Hanguang-Jun was there."

Jiang Cheng huffed, still annoyed with his martial brother, "You can't be scared of dogs forever. One day I'm going to make Fairy follow you around until you get used to it."

"D-Don't you dare, Jiang Cheng!" Wei Wuxian pointed viciously at him, "Or I'm going to tell everyone your deepest, darkest secret."

"You know shit, Wei—"

"Dogs are forbidden in Cloud Recesses." Lan Wangji stated before Jiang Cheng could finish.

Jiang Cheng almost sputtered. He scowled, "Since when? I recall Jin Zixuan bringing his before."

"It was banned after," was all Lan Wangji would say on the matter. Wei Wuxian stuck his tongue happily out at Jiang Cheng from where he was hugging Lan Wangji's shoulders.

On the other hand, Lan Qiren's brow twitched, just now realizing why Wangji had asked for this particular rule to be placed on the Wall back then.

Jin Ling was shocked to see Lan Wangji. 'Why would this lunatic show up alongside him again?!' Fairy howled a few times, then hid behind Jin Ling with its tail between its legs.

Lan Wangji didn't care that this dog came from Lianfang-Zun and disciplined it with a look. Jin Ling thought, 'It's all over. He'll definitely kill the spiritual dog that I took such great lengths to train, and then give me a harsh beating!'

Lan Jingyi snorted. "As afraid as we are to Hanguang-Jun's wrath, he would never do that."

Another Gusu Lan disciple nodded, "Yeah, he'd do worse."

Lan Jingyi, Lan Sizhui and the rest of the juniors nearby turned to look at him in surprise. The disciple blinked, "What?"

“What do you mean Hanguang-Jun would do worse? He’d probably just make Jin Ling here handstand for a couple of hours.” Lan Jingyi said.

“Oh, but haven’t you ever heard Hanguang-Jun punishing Senior Wei? One time I saw him dragging Senior Wei to the cold springs when I was on my way there too, and then I heard screams before I got in. I ran away as fast as I could.” The disciple murmured, looking as if he’d been traumatized by the experience.

Lan Jingyi and Lan Sizhui were both looking traumatized too but for completely different reasons.

… Maybe they should ask one of the older cultivators to cleanse the cold springs when they get back.

Wei Wuxian ducked under Lan Wangji’s arm and clung to him from behind. Lan Wangji instantly froze. Taking this opportunity, Jin Ling blew two more whistles, and ran off with his black-haired spiritual dog.

Tang Tang cackled to her friends, “Look at Hanguang-Jun,” she whispered excitedly, “he’s so stiff because the one he likes is hugging him.”

“Aww, that’s so cute.” Li Li cooed.

“ *They’re* cute.” Fei Fei agreed with a broad grin.

Meanwhile, Wei Wuxian too noticed his husband’s reaction and he couldn’t help but laugh, squeezing him tighter in his embrace. He then sat back in his original spot beside Lan Wangji.

“I can’t believe I didn’t notice this.” Wei Wuxian sighed ruefully.

Lan Wangji hummed with a soft smile, looking like he was radiating happiness after having Wei Wuxian’s arms around him.

Ouyang Zizhen was laughing at Jin Ling’s escape. “Smart of you to take that opportunity.”

Jin Ling shrugged, “They look too occupied with themselves.”

The charlatan struggled to get up and complained, “The moral degeneration of the world is getting worse day by day. How terrifying are the disciples from prominent clans these days! How terrifying!”

Wei Wuxian finally came out from behind Lan Wangji and agreed, “Men are not what they were in the past.”

“Nah, it’s just Jin Ling.”

“Lan Jingyi,” Jin Ling started through gritted teeth, “you are taking this opportunity when we can’t use our swords to make a mockery out of me, so don’t blame me if I challenge you after this!”

Lan Jingyi scoffed, “I’m not scared of you.”

“Jingyi, how many times do I have to remind you not to start fights?” Lan Sizhui cut in, his glare almost reminiscent of Hanguang-Jun’s that Lan Jingyi instantly shut up.

The charlatan hurriedly tossed the stack of “The Yiling Patriarch’s Evil-Suppressing Portraits” into Wei Wuxian’s hands, “Brother, thank you so much for what happened earlier! This is a gift for you. If you cut the price and sell one for three coins, you’d still end up earning at least three hundred.”

Lan Wangji took a look at the scary-faced hunk in the portrait and did not comment. Wei Wuxian was incredulous. “This is to thank me? If you really want to thank me, you can draw him in a prettier way!”

Wei Wuxian nodded enthusiastically to his past-self’s words.

“Lan Zhan, were you laughing inside when you saw those portraits of me? Don’t worry, I won’t get mad.” Wei Wuxian asked.

Lan Wangji shook his head, “I did not like them. Did not capture Wei Ying’s beauty at all.”

Redness blooming over his cheeks, Wei Wuxian covered his face and his words were muffled into his palms, “I should have seen that coming. Gods, Lan Zhan, you’re too much.”

Lan Wangji looked at his husband in amusement and pried Wei Wuxian’s hands away to see his pretty husband’s blushing face.

Then Wei Wuxian asked the charlatan if there were any strange events that happened here. He responded that he was known as the know-it-all of Qinghe and told them not to go to the Xinglu Ridge two miles away.

Wei Wuxian asked, “Why is that?”

The charlatan replies, “The Xinglu Ridge is also called the Man-Eating Ridge. Why do you think that is?”

Nie Huaisang paused, then thought, ‘Oh right… well, there goes our family secret.’

He sighed and began to think of counterarguments he was going to have to face later on.

Chapter End Notes

if anyone would like to follow me or just support me (since i realized you can’t link kofis here haha thanks to those who informed me btw!), i’m @emma_screams on twitter

Next chapter: going to the Man-Eating Ridge…

See you next week~

Contentment III (1)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Wei Wuxian replied, sounding bored, "Huh, so there's an evil being that eats humans there?"

The charlatan began explaining about the 'man-eating castle' with monsters that feed on the humans living inside it. No corpses could be found.

"I've heard of this too!" A cultivator told his senior martial brother, his face filled with fear. "The servers in the inn talked about it and at first, my fellow disciples and I wanted to check it out but we kept getting lost in the forest."

"Oh, I know what you mean. I feel like it's all a hoax, somebody just playing tricks on us." Another cultivator piped up, his mouth pursed in a straight line.

"But what about the people who disappeared?"

"How do we even know that someone disappeared if no one can identify the missing people?"

"Maybe there's treasure hidden in that hidden man-eating castle."

"If it even exists…"

Exuberant discussion continued about this topic, while Nie Huaisang's complexion grew paler and paler. Some of the older Nie disciples were also getting anxious, shooting glances at their Sect Leader as they wondered what they should do. This was a Nie Clan Sect secret *ah* !

Thinking that Jin Ling came for the monster in the Xinglu Ridge, Wei Wuxian told the charlatan a hole in his story. "But, if nothing was left behind, and no corpses could be found, how can it be known that they were eaten?"

The charlatan answered, "Of course someone saw it."

Wei Wuxian expressed his admiration as he asked the charlatan how could anyone live to tell the tale of this man-eating castle when there are no crumbs left behind and everyone is eaten with no exception? The charlatan could only say that that was how the legend went.

"See? Even Wei Wuxian can tell it's a fake." The same cultivator said, gesturing to the screen.

His martial brothers sent him looks, "But that's the Yiling Patriarch."

"What if he's—" one of them started, glancing cautiously at Wei Wuxian's back before whispering, "What if he's the one who made it thirteen years ago?"

The cultivator stared at the one who spoke like he thought he was stupid, “The rumors began *after* his death—” He sounded like he barely held himself back from adding an insult in the end.

Wei Wuxian asked, “Then, do you know how many people were eaten in the Xinglu Ridge? When were they eaten? Their ages? Their gender? What their names were? Where they lived?”

“I don’t know.”

Wei Wuxian snorted, “Qinghe’s know-it-all? Huh?”

The juniors chuckled and admired the way Senior Wei managed to quickly find the hole in the charlatan’s story.

“I want to analyze things fast like Senior Wei one day.” A young disciple excitedly said. The others around him nodded in agreement.

Lan Jingyi crossed his arms, “That’s gonna take you dozens of years. Senior Wei is naturally smart.”

“That’s funny coming from you when you kept calling Senior Wei crazy.” Lan Sizhui said with amusement.

Not expecting the attack, Lan Jingyi sputtered before defensively exclaiming, “That’s when I thought he was Mo Xuanyu, and he kept acting insane! Give me a break, Sizhui.” He grumpily glared at all the juniors laughing at his expense.

The charlatan picked up his basket in a fury, “The legends didn’t have this kind of information!”

The Nie Sect didn’t give any more information in the hopes that it would throw anyone off from investigating. But of course, those rules don’t apply to people like Wei Wuxian and Hanguang-Jun. Nie Huaisang thought, ‘it’s a good thing not many cultivators are like Wei-xiong or else the Nie family’s Ancestral Hall would have been discovered a long time ago.’

Wei Wuxian laughed and asked why the Qinghe Nie Sect is ignoring the monsters roaming around Xinglu Ridge. A smudge of disdain appeared on the charlatan’s face, “The Nie Sect? If it were the Nie Sect from back then, it definitely wouldn’t be ignored. Before the second day of the legend’s appearance, the Nie Sect would have raided where the monsters roamed at once, in the most resolute way possible. But, isn’t the sect leader of the Nie Sect now, heh, that ‘head shaker’?”

Nie Huaisaing heaved a sigh when plenty of unsubtle glances were sent his way. He already knew the things people were talking about him behind his back, and although most of it wasn’t an act, he did play it up a bit more when in the company of Jin Guangyao.

The only way to defeat a master schemer was to become one yourself. Fight fire with fire, as they say.

Wei Wuxian inquired, "Why is he called the 'head shaker'?"

The charlatan, "Don't you know the story behind it? No matter what other people ask Sect Leader Nie, if he doesn't know it, he won't say anything; if he does know it, he's too scared to say anything. If you ask too harshly and force him, he'd shake his head again and again, saying as he cries, 'I don't know, I don't know, I really don't know!' He'd then beg the other to let him go. Isn't it obvious why he's called the 'head shaker'?"

Some of the Nie disciples looked as if they wanted to defend their Sect Leader. Even though he seemed incapable to the rest of the cultivation world, their Sect Leader always diligently looked after them and made sure the disciples had a good balance of sword cultivation and learning the arts like music and poetry.

Wei Wuxian thought, 'from what I remember, Nie Huaisang isn't an unkind person.' It wasn't that he was not clever, but that his heart was set somewhere else and he used his smarts on other areas, such as painting on fans, searching for birds, skipping classes, and catching fish. Remembering the things that happened in the past, Wei Wuxian couldn't help but sigh.

"Wei-xiong…" Nie Huaisang sniffled, seemingly moved by Wei Wuxian's kind thoughts of him.

Wei Wuxian gave him a kind grin, "Don't cry, Sect Leader Nie. Let's catch fish together again someday." Even though Nie Huaisang was definitely acting dumber than he looked, Wei Wuxian believed that the man's heart was in the right place. And besides, with Lan Xichen not talking to him and Jin Guangyao gone, Nie Huaisang looked like he needed some friends to talk to.

After Wei Wuxian finished asking about the Xinglu Ridge, he still helped the charlatan's business by buying two compacts of rouge. He tucked them into his clothes and walked back to Lan Wangji, who didn't ask for the pouch back. In silence, they walked toward the direction that the charlatan pointed at together. Wei Wuxian already concluded that if the charlatan was unsure of the names and details of the victims, it was most likely a case of exaggerated hearsay.

"Ha!" The cultivator pointed triumphantly. Nobody disagreed with him.

After a bit less than an hour, they finally met a group of walking corpses of the lowest level possible. Seeing them walk over, Wei Wuxian ducked back behind Lan Wangji again. When they saw Wei Wuxian, the corpses were so terrified that they immediately turned around to retreat, their speed two or three times faster than when they came over.

The juniors and some of the cultivators ogled at this sight. Something like this didn't normally happen!

"Senior Wei didn't even do anything and they were already scared of him." One young disciple said to another in awe.

"This must be why he's called the Grandmaster of demonic cultivation!" His friend replied in excitement.

Wei Wuxian had to laugh at their amazement. He straightened up from his slouch against Lan Wangji and lectured, “That’s because they’re low-level fierce corpses, so they’ve learned to fear beings stronger than them, which are mostly creatures with large amounts of Yin Qi.” The ‘like me’ went unsaid but they all understood.

“That’s why powerful fierce corpses like Wen Ning are even harder to control. It took me weeks to revive him.” Wei Wuxian smiled at his friend who had been keeping a low profile this entire time.

Hearing his name being called, Wen Ning jerked and looked at Wei Wuxian, before offering a slow nod.

Wei Wuxian rubbed his temples, and spoke in a fearful voice, “Wow, Hanguang-Jun, you’re so cool! They were so scared when they saw you that they ran away at once! Haha.”

Lan Wangji was speechless.

Wei Wuxian’s laughter rang out in the cave once more as he recalled the fear of being discovered in that moment. “I swear I wasn’t mocking you, Lan Zhan. Well, I was also teasing, but not entirely!”

“Mm.” Lan Wangji readily said, already understanding Wei Wuxian’s penchant for teasing that was like second nature to him. Lan Wangji felt like he could identify Wei Wuxian from a crowd, if his husband just talked, laughed and shouted cheerfully as he was now.

Lan Wangji only started walking after a few pushes from Wei Wuxian. Before Wei Wuxian caught up, a series of wild barks suddenly came from far away. Wei Wuxian’s face changed instantly. He shifted behind Lan Wangji lightning fast and squatted into a ball, arms hugging the other’s waist.

The trio of girls couldn’t help but squeal at this imagery, hands covering the lower half of their blushing faces.

“Look at Wei Wuxian hugging Lan Wangji’s middle!” Tang Tang gleefully pointed out.

Fei Fei cooed, “He’s so scared. He’s actually so adorable.”

Li Li nodded along to their words, her eyes bright like she’s been given life, “I love how Hanguang-Jun just stands there and let’s Wei Wuxian use him as a shield. He’ll protect Wei Wuxian, even against dogs.”

“Yes!” Then they dissolved into more giggling and spazzing. Meanwhile, a cut-sleeve cultivator was eyeing them speculatively, wondering how he could get into… *that* .

Lan Wangji told him. “... It is still far away. What are you hiding for?”

Wei Wuxian stuttered, “I-I-I-I-I-I-I’m gonna hide first then see. Where is it? Where is it?!”

Lan Wangji listened intently for a moment and said it was Jin Ling’s dog. Hearing Jin Ling’s name, Wei Wuxian stood up at once, but squatted back down after hearing a few more barks.

“Wei Wuxian really is afraid of dogs.” A cultivator observed neutrally.

But Sect Leader Yang interjected, “If we’d known that, we could have walked into the Burial Mounds with a dozen of dogs. That’ll teach him.”

Some nodded, while others didn’t voice their opinion. A lot of the women cultivators were being swayed seeing this vulnerable side of Wei Wuxian.

Lan Wangji asked, “Why are you afraid of dogs?”

“I had some nasty experiences.” Wei Wuxian murmured with a little self-deprecating smile. The screen moved to show the ground before it suddenly transitioned to a blanket of snow.

Wei Wuxian blinked, “What’s happening?”

Lan Xichen hummed in thought, “Could it be another trip to the past?”

Then the scene showed a very young Wei Wuxian backing up against an alley with three vicious dogs in front of him.

“Oh.” Wei Wuxian grimaced, already knowing where this was going. He definitely didn’t need a repeat of what he considered to be a traumatic experience. But before he could move, Hanguang-Jun had already reached out and pulled Wei Wuxian into an embrace, pushing his head on his shoulder so that his husband would no longer see it.

Wei Wuxian could still hear the menacing growls and loud barks from the screen, but with Lan Wangji’s sandalwood scent filling his senses, he allowed himself to relax a little bit against Lan Zhan.

Chapter End Notes

continuation of wwx being scared of dogs and their reactions will happen next chapter!

Also in next chapter: saving Jin Ling, Jiang Cheng might get an aneurysm

See you next week~

Contentment III (2)

Chapter Notes

unedited cos we die like wwx

See the end of the chapter for more notes

With brows slightly pinched and lips curved into a frown, Lan Wangji watched as the child version of Wei Ying cowered away from the dogs. His heart ached at the sight of those big grey eyes filling with tears, the grip on his sword tightening as if he could jump into the screen and save his Wei Ying from the threat of dogs like he always did. Instead, he held his husband closer and pressed a kiss to the top of his head which made Wei Ying hum contently against his shoulder.

Interestingly enough, it wasn't only Lan Wangji feeling strongly about this.

The female cultivators were visibly distraught for the unkempt and raggedly-clothed boy on screen.

A woman cried out with hands over her mouth, "Oh no! Look at him…"

"He's so pitiful." Another one sighed.

They couldn't help but release concerned sounds when Wei Wuxian threw his bread at the dogs, but only one of them took notice while the others still prowled closer to the crying child.

A female cultivator in green robes clicked her tongue, "He's stick and bones, but he can't even eat because of those dogs."

"No wonder he's so scared of them."

"If I saw him on the streets, I would adopt him right away!" One huffingly announced, her dainty hands clutching the skirts of her yellow robe. "No child should be abandoned and left to fend for himself like this."

"Is that really the Yiling Patriarch when he was a child?" A male cultivator cut in, voicing the shock that many others were feeling when they saw the terrible demonic cultivator's past. Most of them had thought the boy lucky for being adopted into the Jiang family, and didn't bother giving any thought to what he must have gone through before. Although they weren't outwardly expressing it, their heart's itched at the terrible circumstance young Wei Wuxian was in.

Even the trio of girls, Tang Tang, Fei Fei and Li Li, were sympathizing over the scene.

“Aww, I wish Hanguang-Jun was there to protect him.” Tang Tang frowned, looking at the other two girls who nodded.

“I’m sure Hanguang-Jun wishes the same thing too.”

“Poor thing.” Li Li said, her eyes watering up a little as child Wei Wuxian tried defending himself with a rock, but he missed hitting the feral dogs by a mile.

Meanwhile, Jiang Cheng’s thoughts were in a turmoil. He couldn’t help but remember all the times he’d teased and complained to Wei Wuxian why he would have such a ridiculous fear of dogs when they were so harmless. But despite being told of what Wei Wuxian had experienced, Jiang Cheng had continued to downplay their impact on his brother. Admittedly, Wei Wuxian always embellished his stories with all kinds of exaggerations that Jiang Cheng had grown used to not fully believing them.

Still…. he’d ignored Wei Wuxian’s fear and even used it to his advantage a few times. Grimacing, Jiang Cheng glanced over at his brother who was tucked against Lan Wangji’s side as usual, his face turned away from having to face his past self.

Jin Ling, who was frowning at the screen, thought, ‘I should make sure to train Fairy not to approach Senior Wei when he’s around.’

Then somebody by the Dongting Lin sect suddenly scoffed, his nasal voice resounding loudly in the cave, “Just because he’s had a terrible past doesn’t excuse what he did in the future. He’ll still grow up and cause the deaths of countless innocents.” Several cultivators, who had felt some awkward feelings about the poor situation of child Wei Wuxian, were instantly convinced and nodded along to the speaker’s thoughts.

Encouraged by the response, the Nasal-Voice cultivator continued, “So you ladies shouldn’t be so easily swayed by a snivelling child. Don’t forget that he took advantage of the Jiang family’s kindness and what did he do? He destroyed them before Sect Leader Jiang took over.”

Growing rigid, Jiang Cheng clenched his jaw and was ready to give the cultivator a piece of his mind, when Yu Nianzhen suddenly spoke up, “Do you take us as uneducated and gullible? Of course we remember what the Yiling Patriarch did, but that doesn’t mean we can’t feel sympathy over his past as a child.”

Nasal-Voice cultivator sneered, “He doesn’t deserve it. Child or not, he’s still a demon.”

Yu Nianzhen’s eyes hardened and her tone grew cold, as she said, “I pity for whatever children you might have in the future then. Compassion is a trait you’ll need to raise proper children in this world. Too bad you have none.”

Afterwards, she turned her back to him, and no longer cared for the words made by the Nasal-Voice cultivator.

Having listened to the conversation, Wei Wuxian couldn’t help but be touched. He didn’t think anyone in the Meishan Yu clan had favorable opinions about him.

Just as child Wei Wuxian raised his hands over himself for protection, the sounds of growling turned into whimpering, before they disappeared all together. Trembling, he slowly looked up and the screen showed Jiang Fengmian smiling at him.

"Good boy. Don't be scared. It's alright." He said, reaching out a hand towards Wei Wuxian. He introduced himself as Jiang Fengmian and a friend to Wei Wuxian's parents. He asked him if he could take him home to Lotus Pier.

When the female cultivators saw the happy smile blooming on Wei Wuxian's face, they couldn't help but feel their hearts be moved by this pitiful and adorable child.

One of them nudged at her companion, commenting with a gesture to the screen, "How cute. Despite being in such rough conditions, he can still smile like that."

Her friend sighed, "Ah, I wish I could have a child that smiles as lovingly as him."

"I agree."

By the front, Wei Wuxian had craned his head to watch Jiang Fengmian take the child version of himself home. Nostalgia and pain entered his eyes as he watched his past self be carried off in Uncle Jiang's arms, remembering how nice it felt to be cocooned in someone's arms again. It was the same feeling he had now with Lan Wangji, who always freely gave his affections to Wei Wuxian.

Meanwhile, Jiang Cheng watched his father and Wei Wuxian on screen with a complicated gaze. He'd always been jealous of the fact that Wei Wuxian had been carried more times by his father than him, and though it still left a bitter taste in his mouth, he couldn't find it in himself to be angry about Wei Wuxian getting the better treatment this time.

The scene shifted back to the present, and Wei Wuxian blinked as the memories of his past ended. Lan Wangji looked behind himself briefly at the empty trees, before he spoke up, "If a spiritual dog is barking in such a way, something must have happened."

Reminded of this day, Jiang Cheng furrowed his brows and looked over at Jin Ling who had long since began hiding himself among the juniors once more.

Wei Wuxian groaned a few times, then stood up with effort, his legs still trembling, "Th-th-th-th-th-th-then let's go and see!"

Lan Wangji didn't move at all. Wei Wuxian cried, "Hanguang-Jun, why don't you move? Move! If you don't move, what do I do?!"

After a moment of silence, Lan Wangji replied, "First… let go."

Tang Tang laughed into the palm of her hand, "How could Hanguang-Jun move when Wei Wuxian is wrapped around him like that?"

"I bet if I were Hanguang-Jun, I wouldn't be complaining." Fei Fei wiggled her eyebrows.

“I think Hanguang-Jun asked Wei Wuxian to let go because it was making him feel… uhm…” Li Li’s face grew red, unable to say it. However, the two girls understood her instantly as they laughed together.

The two ended up circling two times around the cedarwood forest. Wei Wuxian spoke, “There’s a maze array here?”

After about fifteen minutes of the dog barking, the silhouettes of creepy, stone castles appeared amid the cedarwood forest.

The older Nie clan disciples nervously fidgeted around, throwing worried and panicky glances to Nie Huaisang who was calmly fanning himself.

Jin Ling’s black-haired spiritual dog was outside of the cluster of stone castles. It ran around them, sometimes grunting in a low voice and sometimes barking wildly. Seeing that Lan Wangji approached, it backed off slightly out of fear, but, instead of running away, it barked even louder at them. It then looked toward the stone castles, its front paws restlessly digging into the ground.

Jiang Cheng’s eyes narrowed.

Wei Wuxian hid behind Lan Wangji and spoke in a pained voice, “Why is it still not going away…? Where’s its owner? Why is its owner gone?!”

Lan Wangji spoke, “Let us go inside to see.”

“How? There’s no door.”

The dog yelped as it leaped, almost biting Lan Wangji’s robes, but it bit at Wei Wuxian’s clothes instead, tugging him in a certain direction.

Wei Wuxian extended his arms toward Lan Wangji, “Lan Zhan… Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan… Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan, Lan Zhan!!!”

The juniors sighed, some amused and some feeling a bit embarrassed for Senior Wei.

“Jin Ling, maybe you should teach Fairy not to do that around, Senior Wei.” Lan Jingyi suggested, while Lan Sizhui nodded.

Jin Ling humphed, “I’ve already thought of training Fairy about it.”

“Thank you, Jin Ling.” Sizhui smiled, which got Jin Ling huffing even more, but he seemed pleased about it.

The dog dragged Wei Wuxian, and Wei Wuxian dragged Lan Wangji. The dog led them halfway around, to the back of the stone castle where an entrance was found. The dog loosened its teeth. It made another series of barks toward the inside, and madly wagged its tail at the two of them.

Finally scowling, Jiang Cheng called out in a stern tone, “A-Ling... ”

Jin Ling pretended he was dead or heard nothing at all.

Lan Wangji went inside first with Bichen's glow lighting the way. Wei Wuxian hurriedly rushed inside as well, nearly crashing into him. Lan Wangji held his hand to support him as Wei Wuxian shook his head.

Fei Fei gasped excitedly, "Do you think we'll be getting some action in the cave?"

"That'd be too risky since they don't know what they're going into." A male voice suddenly dropped in among their giggling. The three looked curiously at the cultivator who flushed under their blatant stares. "B-But I wouldn't hate to see it."

Tang Tang hummed, then nodded, "That's true."

The spiritual dog could only sit down outside of the entrance, its tail wagging faster and faster. Wei Wuxian was so glad that he took Lan Wangji's hand and held it as they walked a few steps inside.

Wei Wuxian could hear a slight echo the deeper they went. However, he finally couldn't endure it any longer and stopped in his tracks, pressing his right hand on his temple and scrunching his brows.

Everybody else also began cupping their hands over their ears, the sounds coming from Wei Wuxian's thoughts too loud to bear.

What… what was this?!

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: saving Jin Ling part II

See you next week~

Contentment IV

Chapter Notes

ahh my head was pounding yesterday so i couldn't post the chap orz

hope you enjoy this!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lan Wangji turned around to ask, "What happened?"

Wei Wuxian replied, "... It's so loud."

Lan Wangji hadn't understood what Wei Wuxian meant before, but now, with Wei Wuxian's thoughts aired out like this, he could feel the slight throbbing in his temples as whispers and shrieks filled his mind.

"...are these the voices of the souls trapped in that place?" Liu Dazhong questioned, a hand holding his head the same way many cultivators were doing. An ocean of whispers, rustles, and giggles seemed to be coming in every direction. The voices involved both male and female, old and young, loud and quiet. They could even hear a few fragmented sentences, but they came and went, not allowing them to catch any specific words.

"I feel like I'm going crazy!" A junior whined in discomfort.

Another cultivator was holding his head and pleaded, "Somebody make it stop!"

"Wei Wuxian, how do you— can you— is there anyway to shut them off?!" Sect Leader Yao angrily demanded.

Wei Wuxian wasn't impolite as he answered, "These aren't my thoughts now, Sect Leader Yao. Brother Liu is correct when he said that these are voices coming from the Man-Eating Ridge. You'll just have to wait until the past me stops hearing it."

"Heavens, Wei-xiong, how could you bear this?" Nie Huaisang questioned. He was amazed how much resentment could be felt from those voices, and he inwardly shivered, unable to see his Ancestral Hall the same way again.

Wei Wuxian shrugged, a wry grin on his face, "I've heard worse."

Reminded of the rumors that Wei Wuxian was thrown in the Burial Mounds by the Wen sect, many cultivators couldn't say a thing after.

Then Wei Wuxian turned to Lan Wangji and worriedly fretted over him, seeing the slight wrinkle of his eyebrows.

Wei Wuxian continued to press on his temple with one hand, and used the other to grab a palm-sized Compass of Evil from the Qiankun Bag. The pointers on the compass shakily spun two times, then started to spin faster and faster. A few moments later, it spun madly around!

Wei Wuxian called out loud, "Jin Ling!"

Jiang Cheng put his hands down from his ears and glared at Jin Ling through the crowd of juniors, "Jin Ling, what the hell were you doing in there? Did you think you could solve the mystery of that Man-Eating Ridge by yourself?"

"Uncle…" Jin Ling pursed his lips and decided to come clean to avoid his uncle furiously coming down on him later, "I know that now. I didn't realize how dangerous it was until Wei Wuxian and Hanguang-Jun came to save me."

"Save you!? What did you—"

"Calm down, Jiang Cheng, you might pop a vein." Wei Wuxian cut in, grinning cheekily when Jiang Cheng's glare shifted to him.

The two went in deeper and in the center of one of the rooms, there was a black coffin.

Jiang Cheng clenched his fists at the sight of it and threw Jin Ling a menacing look. Gods, if that brat ended up getting trapped in a coffin…

Wei Wuxian patted it a few times and praised the sturdy wood, "What a nice coffin." Then Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian opened the lid together.

The moment the lid was opened, the noise in Wei Wuxian's ears suddenly multiplied.

The cultivators who were more prideful or who had more self-control like Lan Wangji started showing more signs of discomfort.

Lan Qiren uncomfortably shifted, not liking how the agitated voices continued to grate his ears. He knew dabbling in demonic cultivation was a nasty business. Though Wei Wuxian had mostly used his powers for the good, he would never understand what reason anyone could have for meddling into those dark arts.

Wei Wuxian thought of a few dozen possibilities, 'could Jin Ling be inside?'

Lan Jingyi shuddered, despite knowing Jin Ling was well and alive beside him. It was still creepy thinking anyone could be stuck inside a coffin!

Jin Ling wished it had been a coffin instead. He ended up much worse!

But surprisingly, the coffin was empty. The sounds in his head also receded.

Almost every cultivator sighed in relief.

Lan Wangji went slightly nearer, and Bichen illuminated the bottom of the coffin. Inside, there lay a saber.

"A saber?"

"Who would bury a weapon without the corpse?" One cultivator queried.

Just the mention of the word 'saber' had many eyes flitting towards the Qinghe Nie sect. Nie Huisang wondered if anyone would connect the dots before his past-self started explaining.

The two closed the coffin lid and continued walking. They found other coffins like this in some other rooms, and within every coffin, there was a saber. Wei Wuxian had no idea where Jin Ling was.

Jiang Cheng felt himself growing worried. Where could Jin Ling be if he weren't in any of the coffins?

Lan Wangji brought out his guqin and played a melody.

"Oh, it's Inquiry!" A Gusu Lan junior pointed out.

Ouyang Zizhen asked, "That's the one Sizhui played back at Yi City, right? The one where you can communicate with the dead."

The junior nodded cheerfully, "Yeah!"

He only played a short excerpt, and then took his right hand away from the guqin. Suddenly, the strings quivered, and one note sounded on its own.

Wei Wuxian whispered, "HanGuang-Jun, help me ask what is this place, what is it for, and who built it."

After Lan Wangji played a few notes, the strings played two notes. Wei Wuxian quickly asked, "What did it say?"

Those who were not proficient at Qin language eagerly leaned forward to know. This was a skill not many in the cultivation world knew aside from those in Gusu Lan.

"I do not know."

"What?"

Lan Xichen had to stifle a chuckle at his brother's wit.

Lan Wangji replied in an unhurried manner, "It said, 'I do not know'."

Wei Wuxian looked at him, suddenly remembering a conversation about "whatever" a few years ago. Touching his nose, he was at a loss for words, and thought, 'Lan Zhan is so bright. He even learned how to make me speechless.'

Wei Wuxian snickered at his husband, “I really am a bad influence on you, huh?”

Even though he knew his husband was joking, Lan Wangji shook his head. “Never.”

Wei Wuxian continued to rattle off more questions to Lan Wangji to ask the spirit, but it seemed to know nothing at all.

“Well, that’s one useless spirit.” Jin Ling scoffed, crossing his arms, “How could it not know where it was, how it died and who killed it?”

Wei Wuxian let out a ‘pfffft’ before he placed a hand over his mouth. His body trembled as he leaned against Lan Wangji, laughing.

When the juniors turned to look at him curiously, he just waved a hand and said with eyes almost tearing up. “Keep watching!”

Finally, they found out the spirit is a man.

Wei Wuxian said, “Ask again, whether or not a boy of fifteen or sixteen entered here.”

It answered, “Yes.”

“Well, at least, now he knows something.” Lan Sizhui said.

Wei Wuxian asked again, “Then where is he right now?”

The strings paused for a moment, then replied. Wei Wuxian hurried to ask, “What did he say?”

Lan Wangji’s face was solemn, “It said, ‘Right here.’”

Everyone, who didn’t know the situation, looked dumbfounded.

“You probably missed a coffin or a trapped door, didn’t you?” Jiang Cheng asked, sounding almost accusatory.

Wei Wuxian raised a brow, “You think I didn’t check everywhere?”

“Then *where* is he?”

“Isn’t Jin Ling right over there?”

Jin Ling ducked his head when Jiang Cheng turned and cursed Wei Wuxian mentally for redirecting his uncle’s glare back to him.

Wei Wuxian spoke, “It can’t lie, right?”

Lan Wangji shook his head, “I am here, so it cannot.”

No one could argue with that logic. Lan Wangji was certainly powerful enough to repress any weakling ghost.

Wei Wuxian proceeded to search around this room, looking for any mechanisms or secret rooms that he had missed.

Lan Wangji's expression changed slightly after playing a new phrase. Seeing this, Wei Wuxian asked, "What did you ask this time?"

"How old he was; where he was from."

"How was it?"

Lan Wangji answered, "Fifteen, from Lanling."

The soul that "Inquire" had found was Jin Ling?!

"What?!" Several people shouted. Jin Ling's jaw dropped, looking like he'd been struck.

Lan Jingyi didn't waste time laughing as he recalled what Jin Ling said about the spirit. Wei Wuxian was laughing along as well.

However, Ouyang Zizhen was more worried about something else. He turned to the Gusu Lan junior, "Didn't you say Inquiry is only for the dead?"

The Gusu Lan junior answered blithely, "Oh, I should have mentioned Inquiry can communicate with deceased souls *and* the nearly-deceased ones too."

"Jin Ling, you should be very lucky that you survived that or else I would have killed you myself." Jiang Cheng exploded, having heard the juniors' conversation and growing incensed at the thought that his nephew had nearly died if Wei Wuxian and Hanguang-Jun hadn't thought of investigating the place.

Jin Ling hunched in his shoulders, and tried to look repentant so his uncle would stop being mad already.

Lan Wangji asked for Jin Ling's precise location, and he told them the directions to look for him. "After each note is played, walk forward one step. When the sound stops, it will be right in front of you."

Everybody stared at the walls and wondered if there was some secret portal in one of them that Jin Ling was trapped in.

Without saying a word, Wei Wuxian turned toward the southwest. He walked with each note until there was only a wall in front of him.

Wei Wuxian turned around, "... He's in the wall?!"

"Damn, what fucked up place is this?" One cultivator asked his friend as the other shook his head in horror and disbelief.

Bichen unsheathed. Four streaks of blue light swept past, and a neat pound sign had been carved onto the wall. The two went forward to take apart the bricks. After removing some of

them, a large sheet of black dirt was exposed. Using his bare hands, Wei Wuxian dug out a large chunk of dirt. Surrounded by the coal-black dirt was the missing Jin Ling!

He immediately started to cough and breathe when the dirt was swept away. As Wei Wuxian saw that he was still alive, his heart finally calmed.

Jiang Cheng could finally release a breath of relief too, before he turned to Jin Ling with a furious look in his eyes. “When we get out of here, you’re not escaping punishment for neglecting to tell me this and running off to do this in the first place.”

“But Uncle it’s already been months—”

“Do you want me to double that punishment, A-Ling?”

Jin Ling immediately shut up. Lan Jingyi patted him on the back, understanding him completely.

The two hastened to dig him out of the wall. However, the moment Jin Ling’s upper body emerged from the dirt, the sword on his back caught on the ashen bone of a human arm and dragged it out!

Lan Wangji laid Jin Ling flat onto the ground and felt for his pulse. Wei Wuxian, on the other hand, took up the sheath of Bichen, and skillfully started to poke around in the dirt, following the length of the bone. After a short while, a complete skeleton appeared before their eyes. Wei Wuxian dug a bit more through the ground, and found another skeleton nearby.

Varied expressions crossed the faces of several cultivators. Some were wide-eyed, while others were narrowed in consideration, trying to understand what sort of place would need skeletons buried in the actual foundations of the building. The voices of the dead had also returned, wild and turbulent as tidal waves. It made many people fear this place even more.

“If there are spirits purposefully trapped there, does that mean they have something to do with the sabers buried in the coffins?” Liu Dazhong wondered, stroking his chin.

Wei Wuxian stopped digging further. He took a few steps back as he realized that every part of this structure had human corpses. Just what on Earth was this place?!

Nie Huaisang delicately coughed into his hand as he heard the murmurs of horror and astonishment being talked about already. Wei-xiong’s thoughts were really painting his Ancestral Hall to be a scary one, he’d give him that, but he couldn’t blame him. He’d been scared of the place himself too when he was a kid.

He sighed. This only meant it was going to be a harder discussion to face later.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Meeting Jiang Cheng again.

See you next week~

Malice I

Chapter Notes

> i just wanna take a moment to thank everyone who continues to read and support this fic!! I'm really happy so many of you are anticipating reading this every week, even tho my updating schedule can go wonky between sat and sun lol but i appreciate your patience and love （●´∀｀）ノ♡
>
> also i've been seeing questions about whether or not i'll be adding certain scenes, like the kiss scene or the core removal scene, and yes yes they'll be here lol it'll just take like 5940 years to get there 😂

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The unconscious Jin Ling suddenly sat up. He clumsily stood up with his eyes closed. Wei Wuxian wanted to see what he was going to do, so he didn't do anything as Jin Ling slowly walked around him, took one stride, and stepped back into the wall. He placed his arms flat beside his body.

Jin Ling gaped, "I don't remember that?!"

"That's kinda scary." Lan Jingyi grimaced.

"So no wonder it's called the Man-Eating Ridge. It enchants people who walk in to bury themselves alive." Lan Sizhui commented, frowning speculatively at the screen.

"But why weren't Hanguang-Jun and Senior Wei enchanted?" Ouyang Zizhen asked.

"Maybe it depends on cultivation?" Lan Jingyi said, which got him a scowl from Jin Ling.

"Hey, my cultivation isn't weak!"

"Compared to those two seniors? Yeah you are." Lan Jingyi snorted, while Jin Ling glowered in silence.

Wei Wuxian pulled him out of the wall again. He suddenly quivered in fright, hearing a few barks from afar that sounded fierce.

Lan Wangji spoke, "Something is wrong outside of the castle."

Wei Wuxian carried Jin Ling up on his back and the two quickly went left. Bending down to exit, they saw the spiritual dog growling in a certain direction. Wei Wuxian involuntarily took a few steps backward at the sound.

Wei Wuxian also shuddered, hating the growls and barks of dogs the most. Give him the howls of fierce corpses any time. He turned to Lan Zhan with a pout and the man instantly brought his hands up to Wei Wuxian's ears, blocking out the sound of the dog.

When the dog turned around and saw that he had Jin Ling on his back, it instantly dashed over, causing Wei Wuxian to scream. Lan Wangji shifted in front of him just as he threw Jin Ling down.

Lan Jingyi couldn't help but laugh, the sight of Wei Wuxian screaming like that over a small, harmless dog while throwing an unconscious Jin Ling was just comedic gold!

Lan Sizhui promptly beat him on the back of his head.

“Ow! Sizhui!”

Meanwhile, Jiang Cheng reacted angrily, “You’d throw Jin Ling away over your fear of dogs?”

"Okay, if it were any other dog, I wouldn't! But Fairy was coming after me because I had Jin Ling," Wei Wuxian said defensively, even though he had acted instinctively at that moment. Who could think properly while in the face of one's greatest fear?

The spiritual dog immediately stopped. Lan Wangji bent down and took out a scrap of cloth from between its teeth, and handed it over to Wei Wuxian.

“Huh, was somebody spying the area?” A junior asked.

“Fairy doesn’t just bark at anyone." Jin Ling said, "That person must have been extremely suspicious.”

Wei Wuxian declared, “They haven’t gone far yet. Let’s go after them!”

Yet, Lan Wangji responded, “That is not necessary. I know who they are.”

Wei Wuxian said, “I also know. It must have been the same group of people who spread rumors of the Xinglu Ridge, let out the walking corpses, set up the maze array, and built the stone castles. And those sabers. But, if we don’t catch them now, it’d be a bother to find them later.”

"Oh, of course." Liu Dazhong muttered, eyes shifting to Sect Leader Nie Huaisang. With any cultivator half a brain, it was obvious which group of people, or more precisely which *sect* , Wei Wuxian was talking about. But why would the Qinghe Nie sect keep such a terrifying structure? Was it to protect their buried sabers from being robbed? It wouldn’t be too surprising, considering how the Qinghe Nie sect regarded their weapons. He’d seen cultivators erect harsher protection spells for less.

“Sect Leader Nie, I believe you have something to explain here.” Sect Leader Yang voiced the opinion many have concluded to. Only Lan Xichen didn’t offer Nie Huaisang a single look.

Nie Huaisang sighed behind his fan, but when he brought it down, a nervous expression took over his face as he stuttered, “Se-Sect Leader Yang, it’s really not what you think. If you continue watching, your questions will be answered.”

His response basically confirmed that the Man-Eating Ridge had something to do with the Qinghe Nie Sect, and people began to send suspicious glances their way. Nie Huaisang dutifully didn’t make eye contact with any of them, especially the glare Jiang Cheng was throwing his way.

Nie Huaisang bitterly thought, ‘It’s not my fault your naughty nephew trespassed into my family’s Ancestral Hall, ah!’

Lan Wangji told him that he’ll go after the spy, while Wei Wuxian said he’ll take Jin ling somewhere in Qinghe around where they met that charlatan. They’ll meet up then.

Lan Wangji paused but then Wei Wuxian added, “Go. Any later and the person would have run away. I’ll be back!”

Lan Wangji took one deep look at him and walked off without another word.

“Aww, Hanguang-Jun didn’t want to leave Wei Wuxian behind at all.” Tang Tang said to the girls who all nodded with giddy smiles.

The new guy, who still hadn’t moved from his seat after having joined their area, said, “He’s probably afraid that Wei Wuxian would disappear on him again just like he did 13 years.”

“Oh no, that’s so sad when you put it like that.” Li Li muttered, placing a hand over her mouth.

“If you don’t mind me asking,” Fei Fei started, facing the guy, “do you also like them as…” she gestured with her hands in a motion that indicated them together. The guy understood her meaning right away and nodded enthusiastically.

“Actually, seeing them like that, makes me wish for a husband like Hanguang-Jun too.” He blushed after admitting it, basically exposing himself as a cut-sleeve to these girls.

“Oh, that’s so sweet!” Tang Tang cooed and the girls joined in along with her.

They asked him for his name, and he said, “Ling Bao,” a disciple from the Guijia Yang Sect.

The spiritual dog wanted to throw itself over again. Wei Wuxian immediately shouted, “W-w-w-wait! Take the dog away! Take it!!!”

A cultivator turned to his companion beside him, “Do you also still find it strange how the Yiling Patriarch is scared of dogs?”

His friend snorted, replying, “Instead of strange, I find it hilarious. Look at this supposedly scary and powerful cultivator screaming at the sight of a dog. Wuuu, I’m the big bad Yiling Patriarch, then— ahh, a dog! A dog! It’s coming for me!! Hahaha!” He nudged the cultivator with an elbow, still chortling.

They didn't realize their conversation had been heard by a female cultivator until she snapped, "Maybe if you had a younger brother or a child who was just as scared of dogs growing up, I doubt you'd mock him the same way."

She had a particularly intimidating look so the two couldn't say anything in return, looking properly chastised to silence.

Lan Wangji returned and looked down at the black-haired spiritual dog. It yapped as it trailed behind Lan Wangji, turning around to look at Jin Ling once in awhile. Wei Wuxian wiped a few drops of sweat from his forehead. He picked up Jin Ling again and went down the Xinglu Ridge.

With a boy on his back and both of them covered in dirt, Wei Wuxian found an inn. Using the money he fished out of Lan Wangji, he bought two new outfits and got a room. He first took off Jin Ling's sect robe, then pulled off his boots.

Ouyang Zizhen tapped at Lan Jingyi and muttered, "Ten silver pieces say Jing Ling screams at Senior Wei when he wakes up."

Lan Jingyi choked on a laugh. He said with a grin, "I'd say Jin Ling tries attacking Senior Wei first."

"Alright, deal?"

But Lan Jingyi hesitated, eyes shifting to Lan Sizhui, "Making bets is forbidden though?"

"But you're not in the Cloud Recesses, are you?" Ouyang Zizhen countered with a raised brow.

Lan Jingyi opened his mouth, paused, then closed it with a hum. He nodded, "You have a point."

They shook hands with similar sly smiles. They managed to act properly again when Lan Sizhui turned a questioning eye at them.

Suddenly, Wei Wuxian stopped. There appeared to be an area of shadow on Jin Ling's lower leg. Squatting down and rolling up the boy's trousers, Wei Wuxian discovered that this wasn't a shadow, but a black bruise. It was a Curse Mark.

Jiang Cheng hissed at the sight of it. What the fuck?! Why hadn't Jin Ling told him about this? The brat actually had the audacity to tell him he was fine to his face?

Meanwhile, Jin Ling couldn't help but touch his own leg as if the mark were still there. He was utterly clueless about this. He hadn't realized he offended any malicious spirits in that castle. Was that why they tried to kill him?

Jin Ling's whole leg had turned black, and the bruise was still stretching upward. Wei Wuxian put Jin Ling's legs down and undid Jin Ling's undergarment. He only felt relief after he saw that his chest and stomach areas were all clean.

Jiang Cheng felt himself breathe a little easier too when he saw the mark hadn't reached Jin Ling's heart.

Suddenly, Jin Ling opened his eyes. When he saw his body naked, he immediately got up and roared with a flushed face, "Wh-wh-wh-what are you doing?!"

Lan Sizhui was surprised when Ouyang Zizhen suddenly cheered. He turned to ask, just in time to see Lan Jingyi dejectedly slipping something onto the other's hand. He asked, "What are you two doing?"

They both immediately acted like nothing was going on. Lan Jingyi replied, "Just something I owed Zizhen."

"Yeah," Ouyang Zizhen nodded, "What he said."

Their grins were too wide to be innocent, but Lan Sizhui decided to drop it.

Wei Wuxian grinned, "Oh hey, you're awake."

Jin Ling shut the front of his undergarment and shrunk toward the corner of the bed, "What do you want?! Where are my clothes?! Where's my sword?! Where's my dog?!"

Wei Wuxian spoke, "I was just about to put on your clothes for you."

Jin Ling leaned against the wall with disheveled hair, "I am not a cut-sleeve!!!"

"There's nothing wrong with being one." Ling Bao huffed quietly.

Wei Wuxian beamed, "What a coincidence—I am!!!"

Several juniors laughed while Lan Jingyi slapped his forehead. "Senior Wei, why would you say that!? Now he'd just misunderstand you."

"Hey, I was face-slapping myself too." Wei Wuxian said, chuckling now as he looked at his past-self who didn't realize what he just declared was true.

Jin Ling continued to act defensive, but when Wei Wuxian said he saved him, the boy lowered his sword.

Jin Ling really didn't expect that his savior was a person he hated. Seeing that it was already dark, Jin Ling hurried to put on the rest of his clothes and stealthily left the room while Wei Wuxian was busy.

Noticing his escape and recalling the Curse Mark on his leg, Wei Wuxian quickly shouted, "What are you running away for?! Come back!" But after chasing for a few blocks, Wei Wuxian actually lost him.

Jin Ling sighed. He had only woken up in a daze and didn't trust Senior Wei at that time, but leaving just like that made him look incredibly ungrateful now. Senior Wei had even been visibly distraught for him when he couldn't find him in the cave.

Fidgeting with his robes, Jin Ling's mind raced before he finally decided to stand up and give his two seniors a bow, "Wei Wuxian and Hanguang-Jun, thank you for saving me."

Wei Wuxian immediately waved a flippant hand, urging Jin Ling to stop and sit again, "Ah, no need for that, Jin Ling. It's been months already."

"Let him," Jiang Cheng cut in, "He needs to learn some discipline."

While looking for him, Wei Wuxian was quite annoyed, "Damn. How can this child do such a thing?!"

As he was about to give up, the angered voice of Jiang Cheng came from in front of him, at the far end of the street, "I only said a few things about you, and you disappeared into nowhere. Are you some young mistress? Your temper has been growing worse and worse!"

Lan Jingyi didn't know whether he should laugh or not at the fact that even Sect Leader Jiang called Jin Ling a young mistress.

Wei Wuxian immediately slid into an alleyway. A second later, Jin Ling's voice also appeared, "I already came back with nothing wrong with me, didn't I? Stop nagging!"

"Nothing wrong with you?!" Jiang Cheng shouted, starting to get mad as he saw how much his nephew significantly downplayed his experience. Fuck, did this kid not know self-preservation at all?

"I really didn't know about the Curse Mark, Uncle!"

"Yet, you wouldn't tell me about what happened to you in that Man-Eating Ridge." Jiang Cheng didn't know which would kill him faster, qi deviation or Jin Ling digging his own grave.

Wei Wuxian thought, 'The reason why he hastened to run away was probably because Jiang Cheng threatened to do something to him if he didn't come back before dark or something like that.'

Jiang Cheng said, "Nothing wrong? You look like you just rolled around in a muddy ditch, and you say there's nothing wrong with you! Don't you think that it's an embarrassment to be wearing your sect's uniform? Hurry back and change into something else! Speak. What did you run into today?"

Jin Ling replied impatiently, "I already said that I didn't run into anything. I tripped, and it was a waste of time. Ow!" He shouted, "Don't tug on me like that! I'm not three-years-old!"

"Blatantly lying to my face. Who taught you to deceive your elders like that?" Jiang Cheng scolded, his eyes blazing.

Jin Ling hunched his shoulders and wanted to hide. He felt like he no longer had any face to show with Jiang Cheng, both here and the past, openly reprimanding him in front of everyone. Okay, he knew he was wrong for hiding it, could they move on now? He still wanted to know how the mark suddenly disappeared.

Jiang Cheng spoke in a harsh tone, "Is it that you think I can't discipline you any longer? Let me tell you that, even if you're thirty, I'd still be able to tug you. Next time, if you dare to run around without telling anyone again, the whip waits upon you!"

Jin Ling replied, "I went alone exactly because I didn't want anyone to help or discipline me."

Wei Wuxian considered, 'I don't know about anything else, but Jiang Cheng was quite right when he scolded that Jin Ling had the temper of a young mistress.'

Jin Ling finally exclaimed, "I am *not* a young mistress!"

"Then stop acting like one." Lan Jingyi pointed out with raised brows, as Jin Ling's scowl deepened.

Jiang Cheng, "So, what now? What did you catch? Where's the spiritual dog that your uncle gave you?"

Wei Wuxian thought in response, 'it was chased into some random corner by Lan Zhan.' But then two familiar barks came from the other side of the alley.

"Lan Zhan, why didn't you keep the dog with you?" Wei Wuxian complained, shivering at the dog's barks again. He really didn't like how many times this dog was shown on screen!

Wei Wuxian's demeanor changed at once. Legs moving on their own, he rushed outside. The black-haired spiritual dog sprinted over from the other end, passed Wei Wuxian, and threw itself toward Jin Ling's legs.

As he ran, he ended up right before Jiang Cheng, Jin Ling, and a bunch of other Jiang Sect's disciples.

After both sides stayed still for a moment, Wei Wuxian silently turned around and fled. But after a short distance, he heard a sizzling noise, and a purple electric current wrapped around his lower leg. Wei Wuxian fell at once, after a pull from behind, and Jiang Cheng picked him up by the back of his collar. Wei Wuxian immediately tried to find the Spirit-Locking Bag, but the other grabbed it before him.

Lan Wangji's grip on his sword tightened. He regretted not keeping the dog close now, seeing that it had scared Wei Wuxian and exposed himself to Jiang Wanyin.

Wei Wuxian merely lamented on the loss of his Spirit-Locking Bag.

Jiang Cheng walked a few steps while holding him, entered the nearest shop, and kicked open the wooden bolt that was already half-latched.

A disciple went up and whispered a few things in the owner's ear. With some silver pushed into his hands, he quickly fled to the back of the hall and never came out again. Without any further instructions, the Jiang Sect's disciples instantly spread out from the inside to the outside, making it so that nothing could enter or escape the place.

Wei Wuxian clicked his tongue twice and shook his head. “Anyone watching this would really think Jiang Cheng wanted me dead.”

Lan Wangji gave him a look that seemed to say, ‘doesn’t he?’

Wei Wuxian giggled and nudged his husband, “Hey, don’t get too mad later, okay? You know Jiang Cheng had good reasons to hate me.”

He seemed to say it as if Jiang Cheng had really tortured him after this, and Lan Wangji’s mouth pursed into a disapproving line. He only managed to refrain himself from arguing that Jiang Cheng shouldn’t have placed the entire blame on Wei Wuxian’s shoulders after some thought. He knew the two brothers had been wanting to mend the gigantic gulf between them since the revelations made in the Guanyin Temple without either one explicitly saying it. And while they only seemed to be arguing now, Lan Wangji could tell they were trying.

Lan Wangji sighed. Although he had many bitter feelings about Jiang Wanyin, Wei Wuxian still loved the man, and so Lan Wangji wouldn’t make things difficult for his husband. He nodded and Wei Wuxian shot him a bright grin.

Jin Ling stood on the side, looking shocked. Jiang Cheng glowered at him, “I’ll take care of you later. Stay here!”

Jin Ling thought, ‘I’ve never seen such a look on Uncle’s face before.’

Jin Ling shuddered. It’d been scary seeing that kind of expression from his uncle. He hadn’t even been sure if Senior Wei, or Mo Xuanyu as he thought of him at the time, would make it out of it alive.

“I’m surprised Sect Leader Jiang didn’t kill the Yiling Patriarch on the spot.” One cultivator whispered.

“Yeah, he’d basically ruined his life. Destroying his sect, and then his family.”

Another snorted, “If I were Jiang Cheng, I’d have silenced the Yiling Patriarch right then. He was already dead once, he should have *stayed* dead.”

“Uh,” A timid-looking cultivator cut in, “But if Wei Wuxian hadn’t been resurrected, we wouldn’t have found out about Jin Guangyao.”

“Ha! I don’t believe we needed Wei Wuxian at all. That Jin Guangyao was bound to get his karma sooner or later. I’d always thought he was suspicious, that one! Never trusted him.” The man harrumphed, while the timid cultivator fell silent, deciding it was best not to voice the rest of his opinion in the meantime.

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter: Interrogation from Jiang Cheng

See you next week~

Malice II (1)

Chapter Notes

> for some reason, inspiration only hits me at night but that's also when i get sleepy huhuhu moreover, it didn't help that this chapter was suuuper hard to write, their reactions wouldn't come easily to me orz
>
> But i hope ya'll still enjoy this!! ;w;
>
> *edited with a few reactions added 😅

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jiang Cheng added, "Lend me your dog."

Jin Ling whistled and the dog dashed over. Wei Wuxian went stiff so he could only be dragged forward one step at a time. Jiang Cheng threw Wei Wuxian inside an empty room, closing the door behind him.

The dog followed them inside and sat by the door. Wei Wuxian had his eyes locked on it. He exclaimed in his heart, 'Jiang Cheng really knows the best way to deal with me.'

Lan Wangji's lips tightened the slightest bit, the only indication that showed his displeasure. Noticing it, Wei Wuxian tried to appease him by holding his hand.

A brave and curious cultivator couldn't help but ask, "Sect Leader Jiang, if you knew of such methods to subdue the Yiling Patriarch, why didn't you say so during the First Siege of the Burial Mounds?"

Another older cultivator agreed, "Oh, good point, boy! Heck, if we had dogs with us thirteen years ago, we could have avoided the entire bloodbath in Nightless City!"

A chorus of voices began discussing; some people were nodding their heads, while others looked contemplative and started debating.

Jiang Cheng's face darkened. He didn't like what the cultivator was insinuating. With a voice like steel, he responded, "I don't think anyone would have believed me if I said the Yiling Patriarch was scared of a *mere* dog."

"Now, now, Sect Leader Jiang," Sect Leader Yao cut in with a wave of his hand, his sleeve swaying along, "If it's from you, of course we wouldn't hesitate to believe you. Isn't that right?" He asked the men in his sect who all murmured their assents and nodded.

Pleased, Sect Leader Yao continued, “After all, you know the Yiling Patriarch the best, since you grew up with him. It wouldn’t have hurt if you’d given us a little information that time,” he chortled, acting all good-natured.

However, it only served to anger Jiang Cheng which Sect Leader Yao was oblivious to, but not to Yu Nianzhen.

“Why bring this up when there’s nothing to be done about the past, Sect Leader Yao?” She queried in an impatient tone. “Wei Wuxian is already the husband of the respected Hanguang-Jun, and has made up for his past mistakes by saving countless lives in the second siege, so forgive me for being a little outspoken.”

Sect Leader Yao looked as if he wanted to say more, possibly to reprimand her, but Wei Wuxian shamelessly exclaimed, “Aiya! Too much talk, more watching!” He didn’t need Jiang Cheng and Yu Nianzhen kicking up a fuss against close-minded individuals, especially when the issue was related to him.

He sighed, it was always related about him. Why did someone choose to bring out all his past deeds, instead of just letting them die out and forget?

Meanwhile, Jiang Cheng slowly sat down by the table and poured himself a cup of tea. Then after a moment of silence, he suddenly hurled it to the ground. Jiang Cheng smiled curtly, “… Don’t you have anything to say to me?”

Wei Wuxian sincerely replied, “I don’t know what to say to you.”

Jiang Cheng whispered, “You really don’t learn, do you?”

Wei Wuxian blurted out, “And you have not made any progress either…”

Wei Wuxian felt like telling him now that he’d made much more progress these past few months. But with how things were now, he decided to save the thought for another day.

‘The tension in that room could be cut with a sword!’ Many cultivators thought while the juniors winced at Jiang Cheng’s show of anger. They were kind of scared for Senior Wei at that moment…

Jiang Cheng laughed angrily, “Sure, then let’s see which of us is the one who hasn’t made any progress.”

He shouted in a commanding way. The dog stood up immediately!

Wei Wuxian had already been sweating in uneasiness. As the large, snarling dog closed in on him in less than a second, flashbacks of being chased by dogs and the slicing pain of teeth and claws digging into his flesh went through the screen in short, split-second images.

“Lan Zhan!”

Wei Wuxian gripped Lan Wangji’s hand tighter, not expecting to see such vivid images from his past trauma.

Lan Wangji, too, was worried for Wei Wuxian, while also feeling angry beyond belief at what Jiang Wanyin did. Although he often chose not to talk, he was sorely tempted to speak his mind now against the man who had hurt Wei Ying. However, he reminded himself of the promise he made earlier, and reluctantly kept his silence. He focused instead on how his husband thought of him first when he felt threatened, and Lan Wangji felt a bit calmer, thumbs circling over the back of Wei Ying's hand.

In his own brew of emotional turmoil, Jiang Cheng didn't know what to feel as he watched himself treat Wei Wuxian so ruthlessly. Although he hadn't thought of killing him, he hadn't planned on being nice to him either. No longer blinded by hatred, Jiang Cheng could see all of his mistakes in its ugliest form and something like guilt gnawed at his insides.

Jiang Cheng asked who he called. Wei Wuxian didn't answer even when Jiang Cheng commanded the dog away. He turned his head to the side, while Jiang Cheng left his seat and looked at Wei Wuxian's face. After a pause, he straightened up and asked, "Speaking of it, since when have you been so close to Lan Wangji?"

He smiled menacingly, "It really is quite curious how far he went to protect you, back on Dafan Mountain."

Jiang Cheng corrected himself, "No. You weren't necessarily the one whom Lan Wangji was protecting. After all, the Gusu Lan Sect couldn't have forgotten what you did with that loyal dog of yours. How could someone so celebrated for his righteousness tolerate the likes of you? Maybe he's familiar with this body that you stole instead."

Lan Xichen frowned, feeling wronged for his brother. How could Sect Leader Jiang speak of such a way just to insult Wei Wuxian? If Wangji had fallen to such demonic crafts, Lan Xichen would most likely try his best to encourage his brother back, or if not, understand him. But he would never stoop so low as to go against his brother like this. He couldn't help but say in Wangji's defense, "I believe, Sect Leader Jiang, that this is out of line to say about someone as respected as Hanguang-Jun."

Jiang Cheng's lips twitched, his face unreadable, but he didn't seem like he was going to fight Lan Xichen on it. In fact, Jiang Cheng said, "I know. I spoke in a moment of anger, " then to Lan Wangji, he stiffly recited, "I apologize to Hanguang-Jun if my words had offended you."

Lan Wangji promptly replied, "Wei Ying deserves your apology more." And left it there without giving Jiang Cheng any face.

Jiang Cheng clenched his jaw, his eyes sliding to Wei Wuxian who shook his head, "No, we're already done with our apologies. Remember, Lan Zhan?" Wei Wuxian had already intended to leave all that past ache in the Guanyin Temple, and there was no need to reopen those wounds again.

Wei Wuxian snapped, "Watch your language."

Jiang Cheng responded, "I've never cared for such things, don't you remember?"

Wei Wuxian mocked, "Oh, right."

Jiang Cheng brought up what Wei Wuxian said to Jin Ling back in Dafan Mountain. Wei Wuxian's face stiffened as Jiang Cheng sneered, "'I suppose that you didn't have a mother to teach you.' Now, you really know where it hurts the most, don't you? The person who caused Jin Ling to be criticized behind his back in such a way is nobody else but you. You're quite the forgetful old man, aren't you? Have you forgotten the things you said and the promises you made? Then, do you still remember how his parents died?!"

Wei Wuxian closed his eyes and felt like he'd been stabbed in the heart again by those words.

On other hand, Jin Ling was biting his lower lip, eyes darting between his two uncles' past-selves. No wonder those two had looked so grim that time he stepped in. It made him uncomfortable seeing it again, and he hoped his past-self would hurry up to the scene already.

Wei Wuxian immediately raised his head, "I haven't forgotten! It's just that…"

Jiang Cheng interrupted, "It's just what? You can't say it? Don't worry, you can go back to Lotus Pier and say your excuses while kneeling in front of my parents' graves."

Suddenly, a series of hurried footsteps approached, and the door was pounded on loudly. Jin Ling shouted from outside, "Uncle!"

"Oh, thank heavens," Lan Sizhui sighed, massaging the chest above his heart, "Watching that made me feel a little suffocated." He knew Senior Wei wanted to get close again with his martial brother, but seeing them fight just made him feel very sad.

Lan Jingyi nodded slowly, "Yeah, it's… a lot."

Jiang Cheng lectured Jin Ling to not be here but Jin Ling seemed like he had something important to say so Jiang Cheng opened the door with a fuming look on his face, "Tell me, then get out!"

Jin Ling stepped inside. "I really did encounter something troublesome today. I think I might have ran into Wen Ning!"

Wen Ning tilted his head in confusion. He didn't remember Jin Ling's presence around him that time.

Jiang Cheng's brow twitched. With a hostile expression, he placed his hand on his sword at once, "Where? When?!"

Jin Ling told him, "It was this afternoon. There's a worn-down house about a dozen miles south of here. I went because I heard that something strange had happened there, but who could have guessed that there was a fierce corpse hiding inside."

Knowing exactly where Jin Ling had been that afternoon, everybody knew that this boy was lying bravely to his uncle's face.

Jiang Cheng looked thunderous. So the kid thought he could keep lying to Jiang Cheng without any consequences, huh? Irritated and frustrated, he said, “Jin Ling, there’s a lot you’re going to have to make up for after this.”

Jin Ling sighed, resigned to his fate. “I know.”

“Why didn’t you say so earlier?!”

Jin Ling instantly made up a story about how the corpse moved fast and he recognised him by the chains, and that if Jiang Cheng hadn’t scolded him earlier, he would have told him earlier. “If he ran away and you can’t catch him, it’d be because of your bad temper, not me.”

Jiang Cheng was so angered that he slammed the door right in front of his face. Through the closed door, Jiang Cheng shouted, “I’ll deal with you later. Get lost!”

Wei Wuxian rolled his eyes and wanted to diffuse the tension. “Maybe if you treated your nephew gentler like the way you are with your dogs, Jiang Cheng, he wouldn’t run around so recklessly all the time.”

Jiang Cheng went red in the face, “Shut up!”

Meanwhile, Jin Ling felt mildly insulted.

Jin Ling replied with an “oh,” and his footsteps faded into the distance. When Jiang Cheng turned around, Wei Wuxian immediately pulled a mixed expression of shock and fear. Jiang Cheng flicked his whip, hitting the ground beside Wei Wuxian, and spoke through clenched teeth, “You really take this obedient dog of yours everywhere, don’t you?!”

“Wow, Jin Ling, you really just lied like that? In front of your uncle’s face? How did you not stutter?” Ouyang Zizhen asked, looking like he wanted to do the same thing himself. Luckily, the man’s father wasn’t anywhere nearby.

"I just... didn't think Wei Wuxian deserved to be punished after saving me." Jin Ling commented, shrugging while looking away like he was embarrassed.

Wei Wuxian spoke, “He’s been dead since a long time ago, and I’ve died once as well. What else do you want?!”

Jiang Cheng pointed the whip at him, “So what? My hatred would persist, even if he dies thousands of times! He didn’t perish back then. Very well! I shall destroy him today, with my own hands. I’m going to burn him right now, and scatter his ashes right in front of your face!”

If Wen Ning could swallow, he’d be doing it now. Although he wasn’t as scared of Jiang Cheng as he was before their encounter in Lotus Pier, the hostility from him in the past was still kind of terrifying.

Jiang Cheng slammed the door shut behind him.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Jin Ling gets some Good Advice from Uncle Wei Ying

Malice II (2)

Chapter Notes

> i've been getting a few comments that were getting a bit demanding recently, and tbh with having to post up a chapter every week, it isn't easy 😅 so i'd really be grateful if readers could be a bit more sensitive while commenting pls 🙏 thank you!
>
> anyway, i hope you enjoy this chapter!! i tried to reach the bridal carry but my brain was shutting down at 4am lsdfkslflk

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jiang Cheng ordered Jin Ling, "You keep a close eye on him. Don't believe or listen to anything he says! Don't let him make any sound. If he dares to whistle or play his flute, block his mouth first. If it doesn't work, just slice off his hand or cut off his tongue!"

Even though Lan Wangji knew it didn't happen, he couldn't help his fists tightening on his lap. He hoped for Jiang Wanyin's sake that he was self-reflecting on his past-self's words and actions because Lan Wangji didn't know how long he could keep up his patience. His opinion of the man was steadily dropping with every cruel comment thrown Wei Wuxian's way.

Jin Ling replied in a nonchalant tone, "I know. Of course I'll be able to watch him. Uncle, why did you shut yourself inside along with that damn cut-sleeve? What did he do this time?"

Jiang Cheng answered, "This isn't a question you should ask. Remember to watch him properly. If I return to see that he disappeared, I'll break your leg for sure!" Then he left with half of the disciples.

Lan Jingyi tilted his head to check and asked with a raised brow, "So did he break your legs?"

Jin Ling scowled at him, "Of course not! Uncle just says that. He never actually breaks my legs."

"Yeah, but it still scares you, right?"

"..."

Lan Jingyi snickered as Jin Ling indignantly kept his silence.

Then, Jin Ling ordered the disciples to their different watching stations. In a short while, the door opened again and Jin Ling stuck his head in. Wei Wuxian sat up straight. Jin Ling put a finger in front of his lips, walked in quietly, and put his hand on Zidian. He whispered something, and it transformed into a ring on Jin Ling's palm.

“Woah, you can actually control that?” One of the juniors said in awe. Zidian was a very well-known weapon to cultivators, just like Hanguang-Jun's Bichen and Wangji.

Jin Ling sat up a little straighter, “Of course. Uncle trusts me.”

Lan Jingyi muttered, “Not after this he won’t.”

Wincing, Jin Ling checked his uncle’s appearance, and it wasn’t looking good. The lines of his forehead were drawn tight, and the glare in his eyes was fierce. But Jin Ling knew he’d make the same decision again if he could. At that time, Wei Wuxian as Mo Xuanyu had saved him, and a part of Jin Ling just didn’t want to see the other get hurt by his uncle.

However, if he’d known he was the Yiling Patriarch from the start, then he might have…

Jin Ling shook his head. It was best not to think of that. Wei Wuxian had saved him, and that was the truth. Jin Ling had done the right thing by returning the favor.

Jin Ling said in a quiet voice, “Let’s go.”

The two stealthily flipped over the window and entered the forest. But as they ran, Wei Wuxian heard something strange from behind. Turning around, he exclaimed, “Ahhhh! Why is it here as well?! Make it go away!”

Laughter broke out in the cave again, especially from the juniors.

As usual, Wei Wuxian’s fear of dogs made a lot of people amused, but no one mocked him for it. Afterall, they’d seen the memories of why he was like this.

The only one not amused was Wei Wuxian who immediately turned his face to Lan Wangji’s shoulder and asked in a petulant tone, “Tell me when it’s gone.”

“Mm,” said his amazing husband.

Jin Ling whistled twice, and the dog ran away. Jin Ling sneered in contempt, “Such a loser. Fairy never bites anyone. It just looks scary. It only bites evil beings. Did you really think it’s just a regular dog?”

After Lan Wangji’s tap, Wei Wuxian sat back properly again and continued to watch; though he kind of wanted to be pressed up against Lan Wangji like that for the duration of their forced entrapment. Wei Wuxian mentally promised himself that the first thing he’d do once they got out of here was to get as many cuddles from Lan Zhan as possible.

Wei Wuxian questioned the dog’s name and Jin Ling repeated Fairy.

Wei Wuxian reacted, “You gave such a name to your dog?!”

Jing Ling replied assuredly, “What’s wrong with this name? I called it Little Fairy when it was young. Of course, I can’t keep on calling it that now that Fairy is older.”

Lan Jingyi snorted, “Who names their dogs Fairy?”

“Little Fairy. That’s so adorable,” Ouyang Zizhen said with a chuckle.

Jin Ling ruminated on whether or not he should cut off their tongues with his sword.

Wei Wuxian refused, “No. No. No. That isn’t the point! … Who in the world taught you such a way of naming?!” He immediately thought of Jiang Cheng.

Jiang Cheng said, sounding a bit defensive, “A-Ling thought of it himself.”

“But you agreed to it, uncle!” Jin Ling answered back.

Wei Wuxian squinted at the uncle-nephew pair and acted disgusted with them, “It’s in the genes then, huh? Jin Ling, you should be grateful I gave you your courtesy name. If it had been left to Jiang Cheng, you might have ended up being called Princess or Love.”

“Shut up, Wei Wuxian!”

Jin Ling thought about it and grimaced, while Jiang Cheng ground his teeth at Wei Wuxian who only grinned.

“Jin Aizhu.” Ouyang Zizhen whispered to Lan Jingyi, and they both cracked up. Hearing it, Lan Sizhui had the presence of mind to disguise his laughter into a cough.

Jin Ling told him that they were even now after letting him go. Wei Wuxian asked if he knew why his uncle wanted him, and Jin Ling answered that his uncle believed Mo Xuanyu to be Wei Wuxian. He asked Jin Ling his opinion, and the boy said he didn’t think so since Zidian didn’t do anything to him.

“You’re right, Jin Ling, I’m actually the Ghost General.” Wei Wuxian teased the boy who was turning an awful shade of red.

Jin Ling continued, “Besides, he wasn’t a cut-sleeve, but you even dared to harass…”

Wei Wuxian made a contemplative sound. “I wonder if Mo Xuanyu had really tried to seduce Jin Guangyao, or it was all a ploy by Jin Guangyao to kick his brother out of the sect?” He wondered aloud, turning to his husband.

“The latter is most likely. Maybe this will have the answers.” Lan Wangji stated, referring to the screen. Wei Wuxian nodded, and let the matter rest for now.

With some parting words of not messing with Lanling Jin Sect again, Jin Ling spun around to leave. After walking a few steps, he turned to him again, “What are you doing still standing there? Go. Are you waiting for my uncle to come and get you? Let me tell you—don’t think that I’ll be grateful just because you saved me. Don’t expect me to say anything cringe worthy either.”

Wei Wuxian shook his head in amusement, “He’s really like a mix of his uncle and father.”

“Needs more discipline.” Lan Wangji said in response.

Laughing, Wei Wuxian leaned closer and asked, “Why don’t we send him to Gusu Lan’s lectures? At least there, he’d have his friends to play around with like A-Yuan and Jingyi.”

Not refusing it, Lan Wangji inclined his head in acknowledgement.

Wei Wuxian put his hands behind his back and walked over, “Young man, there are two cringe worthy phrases in one’s life that must be said, no matter what.”

Jin Ling asked, “Which two?”

Wei Wuxian replied, “‘Thank you’, and ‘I’m sorry’.”

Wen Ning blinked, the words familiar to him. He glanced at Wei Wuxian thoughtfully, before turning away, his lips twitching between a smile and a frown.

Jin Ling taunted, “What can anybody do to me if I don’t say them?”

Wei Wuxian said, “Someday, you’ll say those words in tears.”

Jin Ling made a spitting noise, just as Wei Wuxian suddenly spoke to him, “I’m sorry.”

Jin Ling paused, “What?”

This got a few cultivators surprised too. The Yiling Patriarch apologizing? Unthinkable. Granted, the man now didn’t seem so overly evil, but it was still strange for the cultivators to hear it from a man they’d all thought was cruel and mean.

“I’m sorry for the words I said to you on Dafan Mountain.”

Jin Ling wildly waved his arms around, “It’s nothing. You weren’t the first person to say so, anyways. It’s true that I had no mother to teach me. However, I won’t be inferior to anyone because of this! In fact, I’m gonna open your eyes and make you see that I am a lot stronger than all of you!”

The juniors who heard this, especially the two Lans and Ouyang Zizhen, frowned. Although Jin Ling was a little arrogant and hot headed at times, he was a good cultivator whom they’d gone through life and death encounters with. He shouldn’t be bullied just because he had no mother. Where was the logic in that?

Wei Wuxian smiled. His expression suddenly changed, “Jiang Cheng? You!”

The juniors were alarmed as well! Did Sect Leader Jiang realize that his nephew had lied to him, and was going to break his legs now?

Jiang Cheng scrunched his brows. Why was Wei Wuxian—

Jin Ling whirled around to look, and Wei Wuxian hit the back of his neck. He laid Jin Ling flat on the ground, rolled up the bottom of his trousers, and examined the Curse Mark on his leg. He tried a few methods, but none of them made it fade. After a moment, he sighed. Then Wei Wuxian transferred them to his own body instead.

Jin Ling sucked in a breath, shock filling his eyes as he watched Wei Wuxian transfer the mark to himself. He couldn't even recall his anger to Wei Wuxian's surprise attack when this move was leaving him speechless. Didn't Wei Wuxian know what he was doing?! The Cursed Mark wasn't something anybody could willingly take, and yet, Wei Wuxian was doing— no, had done it. For him.

Jin Ling bowed his head and touched the leg that previously had the mark, feeling his stomach rolling with guilt. His reactions upon waking up really hadn't been the nicest at all.

Meanwhile, Jiang Cheng had long guessed these would be the turn of events, but the weight in his chest was a little suffocating, like he'd been pulled down from the air. Of course Wei Wuxian's self sacrificing ass would do something like this. It was the least he could do for his sister's child.

It only further proved that Wei Wuxian was a good man, and Jiang Cheng was a fool to have tried capturing him back then.

Many cultivators were eyeing this scene with speculative gazes; a few of them figured it was because Wei Wuxian felt guilty since he'd been responsible for the death of Jin Ling's mother, while others had grown sympathetic after seeing the man using his own new body to save the boy from the curse.

One thing's for sure was that these memories were changing their perspective of Wei Wuxian slowly but surely.

Jin Ling slowly woke up after a while. Putting his hand to his neck, some pain could still be felt. He jumped up and unsheathed his sword at once, "How dare you hit me! My uncle hadn't even hit me before!"

Wei Wuxian exclaimed, "Really? Doesn't he say that he'll break your legs all the time?"

Yu Nianzhen snorted and gave a comment, "Of course not, Cheng Cheng is too soft on his nephew. If he could, he'd bodyguard Jin Ling every hour of the day."

"Who says I'm soft?! Are you saying I'm not treating him right?" Jiang Cheng asked sharply.

Yu Nianzhen rolled her eyes, "Don't have to get your robes in a knot. I'm just sharing with what I know." She gave an innocent smile to his glare.

Wei Wuxian grinned along, secretly glad to hear that Jiang Cheng hadn't actually been disciplining Jin Ling that way. Although too much pampering may had been the cause for the boy's arrogant attitude, but Wei Wuxian couldn't fault Jiang Cheng for that.

Jin Ling fumed, "He's only saying that! You damn cut-sleeve, what on Earth do you want? I..."

Wei Wuxian covered his face and shouted behind Jin Ling, "Ah! HanGuang-Jun!"

Frightened, Jin Ling fled at once, shouting as he ran, "You damn cut-sleeve! Disgusting maniac! I'll remember you! This is not over yet!"

Lan Jingyi held his stomach as he laughed, "You fell for it twice! I can't believe you!"

"And he was throwing those insults at Senior Wei as if he isn't going to be punished by Hanguang-Jun if he'd actually been there." Another junior chimed in with a snort.

Jin Ling paled. He swallowed and didn't look in the direction of Wei Wuxian and his husband at all. He really needed to put a gag on his mouth before throwing such insults like that again!

Behind him, Wei Wuxian laughed so hard that he couldn't breathe. After Jin Ling disappeared, he finally managed to stop the laughter after a while of coughing. Only then, did he have time to reminisce.

There was another flashback on screen, and Wei Wuxian held his breath as a mini version of himself was found kneeling on the ground, happily eating the piece of melon Jiang Fengmian had bought him. It was a bit strange how these events were shown as there was no sound from the people talking, but music instead. It was slow and sweet, giving a sort of sad and nostalgic feeling.

Lan Wangji watched as nine year-old Wei Wuxian was carried on Jiang Fengmian's back. His heart clenched a little when young Wei Ying whimpered and sobbed at the sight of Jiang Cheng's furry little demons, and only Jiang Fengmian hugging him could calm him down.

Jiang Cheng could see his little self getting envious of Wei Wuxian being carried by Jiang Fengmian. That day, he had whined and wailed about having to lose his puppies for some nobody, but in the end, he had to take them away. Maybe that was the point when a seedling of dislike had rooted in his heart, growing and festering the more Wei Wuxian shined brighter and hid Jiang Cheng under the shadows of his light.

Chapter End Notes

next chapter: The BRIDAL CARRY & the reveal of the Nie Ancestral Hall!!!

*update: whoever saw xz's name, sorry that was on me. I was so sleepy at that point 🤣😅 but it's already been edited!

See you next week~

Malice III (1)

Chapter Notes

> ahh thank you for the encouraging comments last chapter! and also to the people who supported with coffee! ;w; I'm gonna lessen my stress by not worrying too much about the release schedule of this fic, but i'll still try to post every week! (which didn't happen this time cos priorities XD)
>
> also i didn't realize there was a second meaning to Jin Aizhu when I used it last chapter (yall were right when I wanted it to mean something like Lovely Princess/Owner) but I didn't realize it could also mean Lovely Pig I LAUGHED SO HARD REALIZING IT HAHA thank you for the explanations!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The short sequence of the past faded back to Wei Wuxian in Mo Xuanyu's body, alone in the forest once more.

Wei Wuxian sighed as the faces of Jiang Fengmian and little Jiang Cheng disappeared, leaving behind only a tiny ache in his heart. Rubbing his chest, Wei Wuxian wondered how much more it'd hurt once Shijie was shown on screen. He didn't know how he'd react, but maybe breaking down in tears and snot probably didn't seem so farfetched. At least he had Lan Zhan's broad chest to cry onto if Wei Wuxian really needed the support.

As Wei Wuxian began leaving the forest, he thought back to how Jiang Cheng had always been the one to chase the dogs away for him, even though he'd laugh at him as well.

A single petty thought rose in Lan Wangji's mind, 'Wei Ying relies on me now and I don't let anyone laugh at him for it.'

Wei Wuxian always thought that Jiang Cheng would stand by his side, and Lan Wangji on the opposing side to him. 'Who would've known… that reality is the complete opposite.'

Noticing his husband's sideways glance, Wei Wuxian instantly explained, "You can't blame me for thinking like this, Lan Zhan. Those thirteen years were just the blink of an eye for me and suddenly, you didn't seem to hate me as much as I thought, and Jiang Cheng seemed to want me dead." Wei Wuxian reasoned, holding onto Lan Wangji's hand.

Lan Wangji interlaced their fingers and said in a low voice, "Never hated you."

Wei Wuxian raised a brow, "Really, Lan Zhan? Not even a little?" He teased and leaned in closer, "Not even when I showed you that porn book in the library? Or when I continued to sneak and drink away in Cloud Recesses? Or even when I touched your forehead ribbon?" He twirled the ends of said ribbon on one finger, grinning coyly up at his husband.

Lan Zhan's nostrils slightly flared as he responded, "No." He took Wei Wuxian's naughty finger away and engulfed Wei Ying's hand in his bigger palm. "What's there to hate when you are my husband?"

Flushing at the answer and feeling remarkably better, Wei Wuxian chuckled while looking shyly away, "My Lan Zhan is getting so much better at leaving his husband speechless. What am I to do when I'm useless from your sweet words, huh?"

Lan Wangji answered with an "Mm," as if the answer was obvious.

Jiang Cheng ruminated on Wei Wuxian's thoughts. He had wanted it to be like that too for them, for the both of them to always be supporting each other side by side. But when did it all start going wrong? When Wei Wuxian decided to save the Wens? When the Wen Clan destroyed Lotus Pier? When Wei Wuxian decided to protect Lan Wangji against Wen Chao?

When… when did it all spiral into this?

At this point, Wei Wuxian reached the rendezvous point and found Lan Wangji standing at the end of the street, his head hung low. Suddenly, Lan Wangji looked up and saw him. After some hesitation, he walked over with a darkened expression.

Wei Wuxian involuntarily took a step back. He thought, 'I'm feeling a bit scared for some reason.'

Even the juniors reared back, frightened by Lan Wangji's glare.

"Ohoho," Tang Tang said gleefully, "Wei Wuxian took too long to come back."

"If they were in a relationship at this point, he'd be getting it," Ling Bao nodded his head like a wise sage.

"But," Li Li cut in, "Hanguang-Jun looked kind of sad before he noticed Wei Wuxian was there. Maybe he thought Wei Wuxian had taken the chance to leave him like he'd been trying to do the entire time."

Fei Fei grimaced as she realized the same thing, "You're right."

"Then Hanguang-Jun just has to make sure Wei Wuxian never leaves his sight again," Tang Tang said with a firm nod.

But his ankle twisted, and Wei Wuxian tumbled. With a change in expression, Lan Wangji hurried over and tightly gripped his wrist. After Wei Wuxian had been steadied, Lan Wangji knelt down on one knee to examine his leg. Wei Wuxian was rather shocked, "N-n-no, HanGuang-Jun. You don't have to do this."

Several cultivators, mostly the females ones, gasped at this act. The great Hanguang-Jun kneeling down for someone?!

Wei Wuxian quietly scoffed, "Don't they know the Lan disciples have to be punished with kneeling all the time? I swear, Lan Zhan, I don't know how your kneecaps haven't caved in

yet."

"Wei Ying, spiritual powers can keep our—" Lan Wangji began, but Wei Wuxian stopped him with a whine.

"I know, Lan Zhan! That was a rhetorical question." Wei Wuxian could tell Lan Wangji was just playing with him too by the twinkle in the man's eyes.

Lan Wangji raised his head slightly, then looked down again and continued to roll up the leg of his trousers. His entire leg was covered with the black bruise of the Curse Mark.

Lan Wangji spoke in a bitter voice, "... I only left for a few hours."

"A few hours is enough for a lot of things to happen, Lan Zhan." Wei Wuxian grinned, trying to look innocent.

Lan Xichen quietly chuckled at his brother's version of a long suffering sigh.

Meanwhile, Jiang Cheng huffed, thinking, 'Who needs a few hours when Wei Wuxian can make trouble in just five minutes?'

Wei Wuxian shrugged the matter off and helped Lan Wangji stand. He said, "It's only the average Curse Mark. We can just kill it when it comes to find me. HanGuang-Jun, you'll need to help me. If you don't, I won't be able to handle it myself." Then he proceeded to ask questions about the person Lan Wangji caught.

"Who is it? Who is it?" A junior asked while shaking his fellow disciple's shoulders.

"Cut it out, would you?!" The teenager batted his hand away, "Haven't you been listening?"

"I have but my comprehension is low." The junior pouted.

Rolling his eyes, the disciple replied, "It's someone from the Nie sect, but we don't know who yet."

"Oooh. It'd be funny if it were the Sect Leader."

"Keep dreaming!"

Wei Wuxian continued, "Let's deal with the stone castle issue first." He then walked toward the shop, and Wei Wuxian faltered a little due to his numb legs from Zidian.

Jiang Cheng's jaw clenched, his hands fisting the skirt of his robes.

Lan Wangji stood behind him. He suddenly called out, "Wei Ying."

Wei Wuxian's figure paused."What?"

The few people who were too engrossed in the story audibly gasped.

“Oh my heavens, he knows.” A female cultivator whispered to her friend, her eyes wide like plates.

“He’s known from the *very* beginning.”

“Huh how?!”

“Don’t you remember that Wei Wuxian played the flute to summon the Ghost General in the beginning?”

The female cultivator was taken aback, “Ever since then? No wonder why Hanguang-Jun was so adamant for let Wei Wuxian stay in Cloud Recesses.”

While others were slowly comprehending the events of the story, the juniors were just happy that Lan Wangji finally told Wei Wuxian that he knew his identity. Senior Wei no longer had to act so shamelessly flirty to Hanguang-Jun again!

Lan Wangji guessed correctly that the mark came from Jin Ling and that he’d been also hit by Jiang Cheng’s Zidian. Wei Wuxian turned around, “As long as both of us are still alive in this world, we’d meet again for sure, sooner or later.”

Lan Wangji stressed, “Stop walking…”

Wei Wuxian asked “If I don’t walk, how am I supposed to leave? Are you gonna carry me on your back or something?”

Lan Qiren exhaled through his nose. Asking for such a thing, even in a joking manner…

“…” Lan Wangji looked at him in silence. Wei Wuxian’s smile froze on his face. When Lan Wangji crouched in front of him, Wei Wuxian yelped, “Stop, stop. I wasn’t being serious. It’s only numb because I got hit by Zidian a few times, not that it broke. It’d look bad for a full-grown man like me to be carried on somebody else’s back.”

They argued back and forth for a while as Lan Wangji tried to remind Wei Wuxian that he’d also asked Lan Wangji to carry him on his back before. However, Wei Wuxian had already forgotten it.

Lan Wangji answered in an indifferent tone, “You never remember such things.”

“How is Senior Wei both forgetful and a genius?” A younger junior wondered aloud.

"'Cause he's Senior Wei. You don't question it." Lan Jingyi replied offhandedly.

Wei Wuxian said, “Everyone says that I have a bad memory. Alright, fine. Anyways, I’m not letting you carry me on your back.”

Lan Wangji asked, “Are you sure?”

Wei Wuxian replied in a resolute manner, “I’m sure.”

Suddenly, one of Lan Wangji's arms wrapped around his back and, as Lan Wangji bent down slightly, another went toward the back of his knees.

Wei Wuxian was horrified, "Lan Zhan!!!"

His cries on screen managed to drown out the squeals made by the group of enthusiastic fans of these husbands.

"Oh my gods!"

"Hanguang-Jun! How bold!"

"I think I'm swooning."

While the girls acted like they were losing their minds, Ling Bao outright sobbed into his hands.

Li Li was startled, "Bao Bao, what's wrong?"

"He's just so-so…" Ling Bao sniffed, eyes shining brightly at the screen, "so perfect! Not a lot of husbands would do something like this for their spouses, but here's Hanguang-Jun being the most ideal husband ever! Look at him taking care of Wei Wuxian like he's the most precious thing in his arms." Ling Bao's lip wobbled at the sight of them.

Understanding him now, the girls cooed and comfortingly told him that they'd help him find a husband like that in the future.

Lan Qiren coughed abruptly, feeling the blood rush to his head at the shamelessness Wangji was displaying in the past. 'I could expect something like this from Wei Wuxian, but Wangji?!'

Lan Xichen smiled helplessly at his uncle, "Uncle, calm down."

"I am perfectly calm." Lan Qiren gritted out in a not so calm manner.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: couldn't reach NHS so he'll be in the next chapter! Pray for our beloved mastermind 🙏

See you next week~

Malice III-IV

Chapter Notes

> longer chapter because someone made a very generous donation and I was really motivated so I started early on this XD and I also felt it was better to have this NHS conversation over in one go~
>
> no promises for me to keep up this pace tho 👀

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Wei Wuxian wasn't embarrassed as he watched himself being carried by Lan Wangji. His husband had already carried him on numerous other instances, not to mention in the Jingshi…

"Hanguang-Jun, you lifted me as if I were as light as a feather." Wei Wuxian grinned happily, nudging his shoulder against his husband's.

Lan Wangji gave a small nod, "Mm."

Giggling, Wei Wuxian squeezed Lan Wangji's biceps through his sleeves, "My Hanguang-Jun is the strongest! The greatest!"

With his ears turning red, Lan Wangji uttered a softer, "Mm."

Seeing this dog food happening before their eyes, the women, who had previously snarked on Wei Wuxian, had ugly looks on their faces.

"I can't believe Hanguang-Jun would do that for a demonic cultivator." One of them said in a defeated tone.

"Why is it always the most eligible men?"

"Shut up." The woman in pink robes snapped, clutching her fan tightly in her fist. Jealousy bubbled in her when she saw how gentle Hanguang-Jun treated this person. She really could not see the appeal of this Wei Wuxian at all!

Carrying him, Lan Wangji replied, "You said that you didn't want to be carried on my back."

Wei Wuxian said, "I didn't say that I wanted to be carried like this either."

But Wei Wuxian quickly relaxed. He grinned as he played with the front of Lan Wangji's clothes, "So you want to see whose face is thicker?"

“Saying you don’t want it, but acting like this.” Jiang Cheng sighed like he was sick of it.

Meanwhile, Lan Qiren looked as if he were five seconds away from qi deviation. This sort of flirting should be kept indoors and away from his sight!

Lan Wangji walked forward and made no reaction. Wei Wuxian thought to himself, ‘It seems that Lan Zhan’s heart for revenge is actually quite strong. He’s going to make me pay for however many times I‘ve teased him in the past and take the fun away. This is such an improvement. Not only has his level of cultivation improved, his face has also improved.’

“And the oblivious Senior Wei makes his return.” Ouyang Zizhen said, smacking his forehead.

“Really,” Lan Jingyi exclaimed with feeling, “Hanguang-Jun is already carrying him and he thinks he’s doing it for revenge.” He shook his head, distressed. Lan Sizhui patted his shoulder in amusement.

Lan Wangji’s face was unreadable when he heard this. Wei Wuxian couldn’t help but test the waters, “So was I sort of right or—?”

“Wrong. Very wrong.”

Lan Zhan didn’t even give him time to finish! Wei Wuxian pursed his lips and nodded, knowing he’d been in the wrong to try. “Okay, okay. Don’t be mad, Lan Zhan. I know now!”

Wei Wuxian asked, “Lan Zhan, you’ve known that it was me ever since we were at Dafan Mountain, right?”

“Yes.”

Wei Wuxian wondered how he knew. Lan Wangji explained that he told him himself. Wei Wuxian tried to guess, but Lan Wangji only told him, “Think.” No matter how he asked, Lan Wangji refused to answer.

“Isn’t it obviously because he called the Ghost General?”

“Yeah, he even played a flute!”

“But Sect Leader Jiang used Zidian on him so I’d be doubtful if he were really Wei Wuxian too.”

The juniors were having a lively discussion of how Lan Wangji found out about Wei Wuxian’s identity.

Lan Sizhui silently wondered if it had anything to do with the song Wei Wuxian played to make the Ghost General go away?

With Wei Wuxian in his arms, he stepped into an inn. The desk clerk choked on some water and stared at them wide-eyed.

A few people couldn't help but laugh at this.

Wei Wuxian cackled at the man's reaction. He hadn't even noticed at the time! "Who says Hanguang-Jun can't be shameless, huh?"

As they arrived at the door of the room, Wei Wuxian spoke, "Okay. We're here. It's time for you to let me down. You don't have a third hand to open the door…" He halted as Lan Wangji kicked the door open.

Another vein ticked in Lan Qiren's forehead.

Even Lan Xichen's brows slightly rose. Of course, Wangji wouldn't want to let go of Wuxian…

What he was thinking, naturally the four-people group at the back thought of it too.

"He would rather keep holding Wei Wuxian in his arms, how romantic." Tang Tang sighed.

"Kicking the door open like that would also make him look good in his partner's eyes." Fei Fei wriggled her brows suggestively.

"Oh definitely," Ling Bao nodded, "Even my heart skipped a beat."

"The well-mannered Hanguang-Jun is actually so rough… " Li Li giggled into her hand.

The two doors sprang open, and Nie Huaisang instantly wailed, "Hanguang-Jun, I don't know, I don't know, I…" He stared blankly at them as he slowly finished, "… I really don't know."

There was an exclamation of "What?", "Him?!", and "Did he end up there by accident?"

Although many had guessed that it had something to do with the Qinghe Nie Sect, Nie Huaisang actually being the person caught in the scene left many people surprised.

Especially the cultivator who had jokingly guessed it right.

Lan Wangji carried Wei Wuxian inside and put him on the bamboo mat. Nie Huaisang immediately opened his fan, covering his face with it. Wei Wuxian got up and walked around the fan to examine him. He thought, 'Compared to the leader of a sect, he resembles more of a wealthy idler.'

"Thanks, Wei-xiong," Nie Huaisang dryly said, even though he did wish he were just one. Spending time just writing poetry or appreciating the arts would definitely be a dream come true.

Wei Wuxian pouted at the continuous exposure of his thoughts. "You weren't really… meant to hear that."

Lan Wangji put the piece of fabric that the spiritual dog had bitten off onto the table. Nie Huaisang felt for his sleeve that lacked a certain scrap, then replied miserably, "I just

happened to pass by. I really don't know anything."

The blatant lie made several people narrow their eyes.

"Sect Leader Nie, I thought of you as an innocent lamb, but now I'm starting to wonder if you actually had hidden claws sheathed within." Sect Leader Ouyang stated while stroking his beard.

Sect Leader Yao nodded huffily, "Right, right! Something doesn't seem to add up here."

"If we could just… keep watching…" Nie Huaisang asked hesitantly, fluttering his fan even faster.

Wei Wuxian spoke up, "If you don't know, I'll talk. As you listen to me, maybe you'll figure that you do know some things after all."

Nie Huaisang opened and closed his mouth a few times. Wei Wuxian proceeded to summarize what he and Lan Wangji experienced up until now since they entered Qinghe. He described that the rumors were actually a defense line—the first one. The second defense were the walking corpses on the Xinglu Ridge. The last was the maze array by the stone castle for average cultivators. That is why Wei Wuxian managed to conclude that it was the Nie Sect's doing.

Liu Dazhong was in awe of Wei Wuxian's quick wit, "Amazing. After thinking about it, it makes sense. However, if that's the case, then the defenses are too weak against cultivators like Hanguang-Jun and Wei Wuxian. Any curious cultivator with similar strengths could have broken in without sweating. Was this why Sect Leader Nie came to visit frequently?"

Wei Wuxian asked many questions afterwards about the Man-Eating Castle and even said, "If you don't give us a proper explanation here, I'm afraid that, after the secret is exposed, all of the sects and clans come here to interrogate you. When the time comes, even if you want to explain things, there won't be anyone to listen to or believe in you."

"Yeah what's the truth?" The cultivators from many different sects complained and demanded.

Nie Huaisang tried to make his presence as small as possible.

Nie Huaisang replied desperately, "… It isn't a Man-Eating Castle at all. It's… It's just my sect's ancestral burial ground!"

Hearing this, everyone was stunned. What the hell kind of ancestral burial ground ate people?!

Wei Wuxian questioned, "Ancestral burial ground? Whose ancestral burial ground buries sabers instead of corpses?"

Nie Huaisang asked with a sullen face to Hanguang-Jun to keep what he was about to say a secret since their brothers had been sworn brothers once. Lan Wangji replied, "As you wish."

Lan Jingyi snorted at the exchange. The entire speech seemed a bit ridiculous now since it was being aired to almost every sect in the cultivation world.

Nie Huaisang's expression looked sullen. He felt as if he'd been tricked.

Wei Wuxian asked, "You said that it's not a Man-Eating Castle after all, so does it mean that it hasn't eaten anyone?"

Nie Huaisang clenched his teeth and answered obediently, "... It has."

"Wow."

Jiang Cheng sneered, already disliking the place after it had almost taken his nephew away from him.

"So it *is* evil?" Sect Leader Yang judged with a deep furrowed brow. The looks he was throwing Nie Huaisang didn't seem very good.

He could only endure since his past-self would be explaining it soon.

Nie Huaisang immediately added, "But it was only once! And the one at fault wasn't our sect, and it was dozens of years ago! The rumors of the Man-Eating Castle on the Xinglu Ridge also started since then. I... I only fanned the flames and magnified the rumors."

Lan Wangji said, "The details, please."

Nie Huaisang finally started his explanation. Because their sect's founder was a butcher, they cultivated using sabers. The sabers of their past sect leaders were all heavy with hostile energy and killing intent. Almost every single sect leader met a sudden death from a qi deviation explosion. Their irritable tempers also had a lot to do with this.

Wei Wuxian raised a brow, "Now, this is getting quite close to demonic cultivation."

"That does sound like it." Sect Leader Yang's face had darkened the more he listened. Who knew the Qinghe Nie Sect actually had secrets like this!?

Even the cultivators sitting near Nie Huaisang and his disciples started to move away.

Nie Huaisang quickly defended that it was different. Demonic cultivation was demonic because it used human lives. But the Nie sect's sabers used the lives of those evil spirits and beasts. If they aren't able to kill them any longer, they'd cause trouble and disrupt the sect. A saber spirit only deems one person as its master, allowing nobody else to use it, and it'd be disrespectful to the ancestors to melt it.

Wei Wuxian commented, "Quite full of themselves, aren't they?"

Nie Huaisang nodded in agreement.

"S-See? It's not demonic cultivation. So please calm down…" Nie Huaisang meekly said, gesturing to the screen. The sect leaders still looked skeptical, but did not bear down on him

as usual.

He continued to explain that the sixth sect leader came up with a solution to ease the sabers. Wei Wuxian guessed it was to build the Man-Eating Castle. But Nie Huaisang shook his head. The sixth leader built two coffins for his father's and his grandfather's sabers, then dug a tomb. Inside the tomb, he put hundreds of corpses that were about to transform.

"That's gruesome." One cultivator shivered.

"I believe," Liu Dazhong began explaining, "it's so that the sabers will continue on fighting even when their owners have passed away. To keep them from going berserk and all."

"But did the Nie Sect kill a hundred corpses to do this?" A disciple whispered to the first cultivator who looked horrified at the thought.

Lan Wangji frowned slightly. Nie Huaisang immediately blurted, "Hanguang-Jun, I can explain! They weren't killed by our sect's people! They gathered the corpses from place to place and even bought some of them!"

However Wei Wuxian still had more questions to ask about the ancestral hall's functions. Nie Huaisang answered that it didn't actually eat people. It was only about fifty years ago when the tomb was dug up by some grave robbers.

"Ahh, such idiots."

"I hate grave robbers. Bunch of troublemakers."

The grave robbers thought they would find treasure in the tomb. But after disturbing the corpses, they transformed and robbers were able to kill them. However, they couldn't leave now since the number of corpses in the tomb was strictly controlled to balance with the saber spirits. After the robbers ruined those corpses, the castle replaced them instead and buried them alive.

Nie Huaisang took out a handkerchief and the bone of a human finger was revealed. He used the handkerchief to wipe away sweat and passed the white stone over, "The two of you can take a look at this."

He explained how Jin Ling had triggered the castle when he used an explosion to get inside. Nie Huaisang said, "Every so often, I go to the Xinglu Ridge to check things out. Today, when I went, I found this. Just as I picked up the stone, a dog came after me. Ah… The sword hall is pretty much our ancestral tomb. I really…"

Despite it being laid out plainly for everyone to know it wasn't meant to be a harmful place, Jiang Cheng was still unhappy about it. However, what could he do when it was Nie Huaisang's ancestors that started it? He could only grumble in silence that they should have stuck to sword cultivation instead of risking qi deviation with the path they'd chosen.

Meanwhile, Jin Ling was finding out exactly what went wrong inside that place, and he grimaced, glad that he managed to get rescued in time. He couldn't help but admit that his

impulsiveness really almost risked him his life.

Nie Huaisang looked miserable as he said, "Most cultivators know that this is our area, so they'd never night-hunt around Qinghe. Who knew that… Hanguang-Jun and you… I already said that you mustn't tell anyone else about this. Or else…"

"So the Nie Sect actually cultivates such a dangerous method, and yet you are reluctant to change it?" Sect Leader Yao asked in an imperious tone.

"Sect Leader Yao, would you be willing to betray your own sect to cultivate a different path than what your ancestors had created?" Nie Huaisang threw back with a small smile, but for some reason, it looked different from his usual nervous demeanor.

Sect Leader Yao, at a loss for words, slowly gritted out, "... I don't know."

"Then I don't know what else to do either." Nie Huaisang said with a shake of his head. Wei Wuxian could tell Sect Leader Yao had sort of pissed him off.

Nie Huaisang left after telling them again and again not to say anything, and Wei Wuxian blanked out for a while. Suddenly, Lan Wangji walked over and kneeled with a single leg in front of him. He proceeded to roll up his trousers with an earnest face. Wei Wuxian hurriedly spoke, "Wait, again?"

"We will remove the Curse Mark first."

Wei Wuxian said, "I'll do it myself." Quickly rolling up the trouser legs, he could see that the Curse Mark covered the entire lower half of his leg, passed his knees, and climbed onto the upper half. "It's already past my thighs."

Lan Wangji turned his head away and did not answer. Wei Wuxian asked, "Lan Zhan?"

Lan Xichen was very much tempted to snort. Oh Wangji…

On the other hand, the girls had no qualms of squealing and laughing at Lan Wangji's suffering. Ling Bao found it so precious that he chuckled along with them.

Wei Wuxian now knew how horny his husband's thoughts were and couldn't help but tease, "What is it, Lan Zhan? Can't handle seeing my thighs? Did you like them? Well, they *are* very shapely thighs indeed." He groped them through his own robes for emphasis, just feeling himself up...

But Lan Wangji stopped him with a grab of his wrist, a mild look of endurance on his face, "Wei Ying."

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Discovering the leg in the Nie Ancestral Tomb

See you next week~

Malice V - Dew I

Chapter Notes

Thank you to the anon for the donations!!! ;w;

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A shattering sound suddenly came from the desk. They both stood up to find the qiankun pouch struggling around. Wei Wuxian reached for his bamboo flute but found nothing. Turning around, he saw that Lan Wangji was carving on the flute. When he took the flute back, Wei Wuxian noticed that it was much finer.

Lan Wangji said, "Play it properly."

A Gusu Lan disciple pressed his two palms together in a solemn prayer, "Thank the gods for Hanguang-Jun saving our ears."

Lan Jingyi joined along with a nod and a serious frown, "We've endured the terrible playing long enough."

"At least the act is now over."

"Yes, and we no longer have to be tormented."

Wei Wuxian scoffed indignantly at these Gusu Lan disciples. With an air of amusement, he said, "You boys are so dramatic. Maybe I should try playing the flute that bad again when you're receiving punishment in the Cloud Recesses."

The horrified looks on their faces made Wei Wuxian tempted to crack up.

"No excessive noise in the Cloud Recesses." Lan Wangji stated, saving the day as usual.

After they played Rest together, Wei Wuxian stuck the flute back by his waist, "In these few days, it's never looked as impatient as this before. It seems as if it was provoked by something."

Lan Wangji nodded and turned to him, "And, it was something on you."

Wei Wuxian immediately looked down at his Curse Mark. "Do you mean that another part of his body might be within the walls of the Nie Sect's Ancestral Hall?"

Lan Xichen's eyes widened, "He hid one of Brother Mingjue's… in there?"

Wei Wuxian nodded as he rubbed the back of his neck. They couldn't tell him before since they'd promised Nie Huaisang not to reveal it. "Yeah, Jin Guangyao probably did it so that in the event it was found, the trail wouldn't lead back to him."

Jin Guangyao was nothing else if not a very calculative person.

The screen faded to black, before it opened to a scene of the Nie sect disciples fixing the walls inside the tomb. When Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji walked over, Nie Huaisang pulled a strained smile on his face, "Hanguang-Jun…and you…"

Wei Wuxian waved his hands as he informed Sect Leader Nie with a grin that they might have to rebuild the walls again later. While Nie Huaisang sputtered in surprise, Lan Wangji unsheathed Bichen and cracked the wall open again. Nie Huaisang trembled as he tightly gripped his fan, feeling so wronged that he was on the verge of bursting into tears.

"He probably didn't know that one of his brother's body parts was in there huh?" Wei Wuxian whispered into his husband's ear, observing every reaction and word Nie Huaisang made.

"Mm." Lan Wangji hummed, unable to find a single flaw in the man's mask. It was hard to tell whether he was acting around them or not.

After Lan Wangji explained the situation to him, Sect Leader Nie immediately swore to the Heavens and Earth that each limb was attached and had not been tampered with. With the Nie disciple's help, each male corpse was hastily cleaned and set row-by-row on the ground, but none had missing a left arm.

Nie Huaisang spoke warily, "Taking apart this one wall is enough, isn't it? Do any more need to be taken down? Probably not, right?"

"Sect Leader Nie looks so stressed," A cultivator in dark blue robes commented with a snigger.

"When is he not stressed? The man knows nothing about being a Sect Leader." His sworn brother in the same sect gave a snort.

The previous cultivator shook his head, "Well, it's no secret he didn't want to be. But with his brother dead, it must have been hard on him."

"I feel more sorry for the Qinghe Nie disciples. I wonder how they get anything done with Nie Huaisang directing their training."

Wei Wuxian squatted down by a row of corpses and asked Lan Wangji if they should use the qiankun pouch. But then he shook his head and thought, 'This doesn't mean that the arm doesn't belong to a man, does it? No, that'd be impossible. I can tell whether a hand belongs to a man or a woman at first sight… Then, would it mean that the owner has three arms?!'

The juniors chuckled at Wei Wuxian's train of thought.

"A genius, they say," Jiang Cheng mocked.

Wei Wuxian loudly countered as if to ignore his words, "It's all thanks to Lan Zhan's brilliance that we eventually found what we were looking for."

Jiang Cheng rolled his eyes at his martial brother.

Lan Wangji spoke, "The legs."

Wei Wuxian quickly called, "Take off the pants! Take off the pants!"

Nie Huaisang reacted, "Why would you say such a shameful thing in front of Hanguang-Jun?"

Everyone else would have been shocked to death by this statement too had they not heard worse things from Wei Wuxian while in the presence of Hanguang-Jun already.

"Ah silly me," Nie Huaisang said with a flutter of his fan, "I didn't realize the stage of your relationship then." He was teasing Wei Wuxian and Wei Wuxian received it good naturedly with a laugh.

Wei Wuxian reassured him it would only be the male corpses as he started going for one.

With a face full of tears, Nie Huaisang thought, 'for sure, after I die, I will be slapped once on the face by every ancestor in the Qinghe Nie Sect and end up injured so badly that I'll be handicapped even after reincarnation.'

Nie Huaisang blinked in surprise at the sound of his own thoughts. His fan covered half his face, acting shy despite his eyes dark with inexplicable meaning.

But Lan Wangji insisted to do it instead. Nie Huaisang looked even more shocked.

The pinch between Lan Qiren's brows deepened as he watched Lan Wangji remove the pants of the corpses with his own spiritual sword. How could he not know the reason why his nephew did it? 'Even in this, Wangji was so much like his father.' Lan Qiren thought with a sigh.

Meanwhile, Ling Bao made a slightly imperceptible sound from the back of his throat.

Tang Tang asked, "What's wrong?"

Ling Bao turned his head to them with a chuckle, "Hanguang-Jun is such a possessive husband, not even corpses can be undressed by Wei Wuxian."

"Oh!" Fei Fei realized with a new light in her eyes.

Li Li giggled, "Hanguang-Jun is so funny."

A few moments later, Lan Wangji found a corpse with both thighs stitched. Wei Wuxian inquired as to who chooses the corpses.

Nie Huaisang replied with a glazed expression, "Usually, the past sect leaders chose and stored them when they were still alive. My brother passed away at an earlier age. He didn't have enough, so I also helped him choose some… I kept whichever corpses that were complete with all limbs. I don't know about anything other than this…"

"I wonder how Jin Guangyao managed to hide that body in the wall without alerting Nie Huaisang," Wei Wuxian said to Lan Zhan.

"Same way he managed to steal musical sheets from Cloud Recesses' Forbidden Library without Elder Brother knowing." Lan Wangji stated and they fell into deep contemplation once more.

Finally having managed to separate the pair of legs and the other half of the male corpse, Wei Wuxian put them inside a new pouch as he spoke to Lan Wangji, "Looks like our dear friend here was cut to pieces. And, not only that, the parts were scattered all over the place—one piece here, one piece there. Just how much hatred did the murderer hold for him? We can only hope that the pieces aren't too tiny."

A junior shuddered, "That's appalling."

Wei Wuxian sighed at his past-self's words, "Thank the heavens they weren't tiny."

The two left the Xinglu Ridge and returned to the inn. The ghost hand pointed at where they'll go next—the Southwest. Following its direction, Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji made their way to Yueyang.

Lan Wangji asked about the Curse Mark and Wei Wuxian said it faded a bit and it wasn't much trouble.

Lan Wangji questioned, "How much is 'a bit'?"

Wei Wuxian indicated with his hands, "A bit is just a bit. How do I explain it? Should I take my clothes off and show you?"

A few people's brows raised while others remained unmoved since it was Wei Wuxian saying it.

Lan Wangji's brows shifted slightly. He replied with an indifferent tone, "Take them off after we return."

Now several more had their brows up and their eyes averted from the shameless couple seated at the front of the cave.

Wei Wuxian cackled, wishing that he could have heard Lan Zhan's thoughts at that moment. How unfair that they shared all of his but none of Lan Zhan's! Well… it'd be best if they were all just for Wei Wuxian to hear.

Tang Tang had her hands pressing against her red cheeks as she questioned, "Do you think this'll show them… you know?"

Li Li gasped, "They wouldn't…?!"

"That's too private," Fei Fei said with a firm nod.

"Well I wouldn’t mind seeing a small kiss," Ling Bao coughed into his hand.

Wei Wuxian laughed and walked a few steps facing backward. They then discussed if there were two different groups they were dealing with in this investigation. The one who stitched the legs onto the body and hid it was not the same as the group who tossed the left hand to attack the Gusu Lan people.

"One wanted to be discovered while the other didn't." Liu Dazhong muttered, "Clearly, the one who stitched the legs is Jin Guangyao's faction, but who could be the one with the hand?"

"They would be the same group who wanted Wei Wuxian back, isn't it?" His companion added.

Liu Dazhong nodded, "You're right. I just wonder how they got a hold of the hand when Jin Guangyao had all the body parts scattered?"

Besides coincidental scenarios, nobody had a clue except for the mysterious man himself.

Wei Wuxian turned around, speaking as he walked, "There are more and more secrets.”

Lan Wangji replied, “One step at a time.”

Wei Wuxian suddenly asked, “How did you recognize me?”

“Think for yourself.”

Wei Wuxian laughed, sounding fond, "I can't trick Lan Zhan at all."

Wei Wuxian wasn’t discouraged and continued to switch the topics of their conversation at a quick pace. When asked where they're going, Lan Wangji said he'd look for the cultivation sect in this area.

Wei Wuxian disagreed. He said, "My honorable Hanguang-Jun, it isn’t that I want to purposely shame you, but you really can’t do without me when handling things outside. If you ask around in such a manner, I’d be surprised if you actually managed to get results.”

Tenderness pooled within Lan Wangji’s eyes. He spoke in a low voice, “Mnn.”

"Whipped," Ouyang Zizhen whispered to the boys beside him who all made different sounds of agreement.

Wei Wuxian couldn't help but scratch under his husband's chin, "Your love is showing, dear."

"Mm." Lan Wangji said with a similar expression.

Wei Wuxian dragged them to a road lined with liquor stores and people advertising in the streets.

“If you can still stand after you finish this, I’ll adopt your surname!”

Hearing this, Wei Wuxian responded, “Very well!” He took over the liquor bowl the waiter held, drank it up, and showed him the emptied bowl with a grin, “Adopt my surname?”

Jiang Cheng shook his head, "You can't help but get into a challenge when it involves liquor, huh?"

"Of course!" Wei Wuxian grinned broadly. "He said he'd take my surname after all."

"And did he?" Jiang Cheng raised a brow.

Wei Wuxian pursed his lips in a thoughtful manner, "You shouldn't underestimate me, Cheng Cheng. You'll just have to wait and see."

The irritated look on Jiang Cheng's face had Wei Wuxian laughing.

Sticking his chin up, the waiter looked even more confident, “I meant if you drink a whole jar!”

Wei Wuxian said, “Then, give me… three jars.”

In the shop, Wei Wuxian chatted with the waiter as he drank, asking for any strange things that had happened in the area. The waiter realized what their profession was, saying, “You two must be one of those cultivators who fly around in the clouds and Heavens. Especially the one next to you. Among average folks, I’ve never seen such a… such a…”

"Fly around in the Heavens." A cultivator snorted, "Is that really how they think of us?"

Wei Wuxian grinned, “Such a pretty person.”

Wei Wuxian nodded at his past-self, “Very pretty, indeed.”

Lan Wangji huffed quietly and looked at Wei Wuxian as if he wanted to kiss him. Wei Wuxian turned his head away with a little smirk, teasing his husband since he’d been reprimanded many times to behave.

“Does Wei Wuxian ever pass up the opportunity to praise his husband’s looks?” Tang Tang asked her friends.

Fei Fei and the others shook their heads, “Never.”

“Imagine having a husband that always compliments your looks though.” Ling Bao said in a wistful tone.

The waiter laughed and continued to tell them about what happened to the Chang Clan ten years ago. One night, the noise of slamming on doors suddenly came from the Chang Clan’s

residence. The villagers found out that everyone in the entire clan died.

He added, "If you're often out at night, you'd definitely bump into some ghosts. Even after they were buried, you can hear them slamming on their coffins! Although the head of their clan, Chang Ping, was away from home and survived…"

Listening to this tale again of the Chang Clan, Jin Ling derisively said, "Xue Yang was a monster."

"Yeah, I still can't believe we fought against him and survived." Ouyang Zizhen said with a shiver down his spine.

"Fought him?" Lan Jingyi started, "You mean Hanguang-Jun and Senior Wei did. We were just useless shrimps on the side." There was a frown on his face as he said it.

"It couldn't be helped, Jingyi. Xue Yang was too powerful for any of us to face," Lan Sizhui reassured, clapping Lan Jingyi on the shoulder, "At least he's gone now. Let's focus on getting stronger so that we can be more of help to Senior Wei and Hanguang-Jun in the future."

A tiny smile slipped through Lan Jingyi's face and he nodded.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: im gonna skip a lot of the storytelling told in the next 2 chapters of the novel about xue yang, xxc and song lan since uh, the interesting stuff about them is told more during the yi city arc lol BUT THAT MEANS WE'RE GETTING CLOSER TO THE FIRST DRUNK LWJ SCENE aaaaaaaaa!!

See you next week~

update: THIS WILL GET UPDATED THIS WEEK!! sorry, I'm just trying to update one of my other stories that I've been ignoring for too long 😅😅😅

Dew II - III

Chapter Notes

> sorry for the delay!! was trying to get through writer's block with another fic before getting back to this. If I ever don't post a chap around the weekends, you can check the last chapter of this story for updates of why i haven't posted yet~
>
> anyway on with the story!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Before the waiter continued storytelling, the owner of the store suddenly appeared and grabbed the waiter's head, "You're gonna die! Why aren't you doing work and instead telling old tales about people dying?"

The juniors laughed at the waiter's panicked expression. One of them pointed out, "This waiter is truly funny and gullible. He's just spilling all the things Senior Wei wants to hear."

"Senior Wei is good at talking." Ouyang Zizhen observed.

"He doesn't *stop* talking." Jin Ling corrected with a snort, "That's two different things. He just happened to find a waiter who also liked to talk."

"But Senior Wei knows how to trick people." Lan Sizhui said with a look that spoke as if he'd experienced it himself. Lan Jingyi had a similar expression.

"You kids don't sound like you're having a good discussion about me over there." Wei Wuxian deliberately called out with raised brows.

The juniors immediately quietened and gave Wei Wuxian innocent smiles.

An older cultivator scratched his head and turned to his friend, "I didn't think it'd be so easy to get information this way."

His companion nodded with a contemplative frown. "Maybe we should night hunt like this next time."

Wei Wuxian asked for five jars but Lan Wangji pushed forward money worth ten jars. The owner became amiable and left them alone.

"Well, if you don't know how to talk, you can always bribe." Ouyang Zizhen said without thinking.

Lan Jingyi immediately defended, “Hanguang-Jun is not bribing! He’s just making a generous offer so that the owner won’t interrupt them.”

“ *Very* generous.” Jin Ling rolled his eyes.

Lan Qiren himself couldn't help but toss his nephew a look. Their sect may be well off, but no one should just be spending their money as they pleased! And for… for Wei Wuxian of all people!?

The waiter went on to explain how the only survivor, Chang Ping, died. He was killed by lingchi with a sword. He didn’t know why the entire clan was wiped out, but figured it was brought by another cultivation sect.

‘Nope, it was just one man who wanted to try out his new creation of the Stygian Tiger Seal.’ Wei Wuxian wrly thought.

The waiter ate two peanuts, “These sects or whatever indeed hold grudges against the others. I’m thinking that the Chang Clan must have been targeted by the other cultivators. Isn’t killing people for the sake of treasures common or something? Those books all said so. Tales and legends as well. Although I don’t know who exactly did it, it was apparently related to a very famous villain.”

Wei Wuxian smiled as he lifted the liquor bowl to his lips, “Let me guess. You’re gonna say that you don’t know who the villain is, aren’t you?”

The waiter cracked up,“Guess again. I definitely know this one. He was called something along the lines of ‘peculiar’… Right, ‘patriarch’. The Yiling Patriarch!”

Wei Wuxian choked, “What?”

“Walked right into that.” Jiang Cheng snorted.

“Yeah…” Wei Wuxian bitterly said.

The waiter confirmed, “Yep, that’s right! His surname was Wei. He’s called Wei Wuqian, I think. People sound both hateful and scared when they mention him.”

“…”

“We can’t expect everyone to know Senior Wei’s name right.” Lan Sizhui kindly stated while Lan Jingyi was suffering in silence beside him, his shoulders clearly shaking with repressed laughter. Even Jin Ling was trying hard not to laugh. They looked like they were two seconds away from bursting.

“If Senior Wei had been named Wei Wuqian, it would fit with his penniless situation.” One junior snickered. And that did it for Lan Jingyi and Jin Ling as they released their laughter in wheezes and gasps.

Wei Wuxian looked over at Lan Wangji who said, “We are leaving.” Wei Wuxian knew this meant that. Lan Wangji had something to say to him and it couldn’t be said in the liquor

shop.

Lan Xichen nodded, like he was proud that Wei Wuxian got it right.

Wei Wuxian told the waiter they'd be back. The waiter understood and asked if they were going to the Chang Residence. Wei Wuxian told him they would only take a few looks from far away. The young waiter came over to put his arm around Wei Wuxian's shoulder, "Is the work that you two do hard? Do you earn lots of money? Probably a ton, right? What a respectable job. Let me ask you something—is it difficult to get started? I…"

As he babbled, he suddenly shut his mouth, nervously looking to the side. He whispered, "Young Master, why is the one beside you… staring at me?"

Wei Wuxian followed his gaze just to see Lan Wangji turn around and walk outside the liquor shop.

This time, Lan Xichen had to cover his chuckle with a sleeve, amused to see Wangji drinking vinegar so plainly.

"Jealous Hanguang-Jun strikes again." Fei Fei smirked with her arms crossed.

"So no one can touch Wei Wuxian but him?" Tang Tang wondered.

"I think he's just frustrated that he can't touch Wei Wuxian the way others can. So he's jealous that they can get close, but he can't because any acts of affections from him would be obvious to Wei Wuxian." Li Li deduced.

Ling Bao nodded, "Agreed."

Wei Wuxian responded, "Oh, him. This friend of mine was brought up strictly. He absolutely hates it when other people are being too comfortable with each other in front of him. Isn't that strange?"

Several people facepalmed, or threw Wei Wuxian strange looks.

"The fact that you arrived at this conclusion means this isn't the first time Hanguang-Jun has glared at a companion with you when you two were being particularly close?" Nie Huaisang asked.

Wei Wuxian said, "Yeah, like when I'd hang around with you and Jiang Cheng, but we weren't particularly touchy to each other?" He scrunched his face, trying to recall their Cloud Recesses days.

Nie Huaisang smiled behind his fan, "Didn't you always use to wrap your arms around my shoulder back then?"

"Yeah! Oh. *Oh.* " Wei Wuxian pressed a hand against his mouth, finding that both amusing and cute at the same time.

Jiang Cheng just rolled his eyes. He'd noticed it then too but always thought it to be Lan Wangji's hatred for Wei Wuxian. Who knew that was actually the exact opposite?

Lan Wangji just silently sat through their discussion, not minding that it was about his vinegar drinking. His past-self had truly gone through some realizations after being constantly annoyed at seeing Wei Wuxian being so open and free to touch with his friends. All his fifteen year old self could think about was how much he wanted to be able to touch and hug Wei Wuxian too.

The waiter awkwardly took away his arm, replying in a hushed voice, "Strange indeed. The way he looked over, you'd think that I was putting my arm around his wife…"

Wei Wuxian giggled, "Imagine if I did end up in a woman's body, then I'd really be Hanguang-Jun's wife."

Lan Wangji was inwardly pleased to hear that no matter what body Wei Wuxian was in, he'd end up as his spouse.

Wei Wuxian quickly said to the waiter that he finished a jar and was still standing. Flustered, the waiter asked, "Young Master, what's your surname?"

"My surname…" Wei Wuxian smoothly said, "is Lan."

"Ohoho! Already thinking of marrying into the family I see." Tang Tang grinned.

"I swear, there's so much foreshadowing to their marriage here." Fei Fei commented with a sigh.

The juniors were snickering at the irony of this moment. Wei Wuxian was definitely part of the Lan family now.

Wei Wuxian asked Lan Wangji, "Should I change my surname?"

"No need." Lan Wangji shook his head and stroked a hand down Wei Wuxian's hair, "Wei Ying, can keep his last name if he wants."

Wei Wuxian smiled, his eyes bright, "I do like it when you call me Wei Ying."

Lan Wangji nodded. He liked it too. It was a beloved name already engraved into his heart.

The waiter shamelessly announced, "Yes. From today on, my surname will be Lan!"

Jiang Cheng could never understand his martial brother's obsession with the Lan name even before he realized he was in love with Lan Wangji. He knew Jin Rulan's name had something to do with Lan Wangji, that oblivious fool.

It seemed as if, for one second, Lan Wangji's figure stumbled ever so slightly. With a mischievous smile on his face, Wei Wuxian walked over with his hands behind his back and patted his shoulder, "Hanguang-Jun, to thank you for paying the bill, I made him adopt your surname."

“Poor Hanguang-Jun.” Li Li cooed, “How did he restrain himself for so long with someone like Wei Wuxian around?”

“Hanguang-Jun isn’t known for his impeccable control for nothing.” Ling Bao reminded, then he sighed, “He’s waited 13 years for his lover. He could wait a few more till he’s ready to confess.”

As they headed to the Chang Residence, Lan Wangji told him that he remembered what happened in Yueyang so there was no need to continue asking the waiter.

Wei Wuxian asked, “The, uh, wiping out of the Chang Clan wasn’t done by me, was it?”

“How could you think you’d wipe out an entire clan without remembering it, Senior Wei?” Lan Jingyi questioned incredulously.

“Hey, I’ve got a bad memory, remember?” Wei Wuxian retorted with a huff.

“Well,” Lan Sizhui delicately began, “That incident did have a few people blaming Senior Wei anyway.”

“What do you—Oh! Right yeah that…” Lan Jingyi looked disheartened remembering the classes they had about this topic. It was just ridiculous the amount of things Wei Wuxian was blamed for in society when he was sure that most of them were just made-up lies. Of course, his feelings about the Yiling Patriarch had all changed after he got to know Senior Wei, but Lan Sizhui did a lot to help ease it with his refusal to believe that the Yiling Patriarch was truly bad.

Lan Wangji said it wasn’t. Then Lan Wangji went on to explain how the killing was related to Wei Wuxian. One of the relations was that one of them was connected to his mother.

Wei Wuxian stopped in his tracks. Pausing for a moment, he spoke, “… My mother?”

Jiang Cheng straightened his back, knowing this had something to do with Xiao Xingchen.

Lan Wangji also halted, turning around to look at him, “Have you heard of the name ‘Xiao Xingchen’?”

Wei Wuxian didn’t. Lan Wangji told him that this man was well-known when he left the mountain twelve years ago. He was a pupil of Baoshan Sanren and Wei Wuxian’s Martial Uncle. At that time, the Sunshot Campaign only finished a few years ago and the siege at Yiling’s Luanzang Hill had just ended which meant that Wei Wuxian just so happened to have missed him.

Back then, Xiao Xingchen would offer help to anyone which made him popular. But he didn’t want to depend on any sects because he wanted to build a new one with his closest friend, Song Lan. That was around when the destruction of the Yueyang Clan happened.

When the juniors heard these names, they all sighed sorrowfully, reminded of their experience in Yi City.

“Oh? So did he uncover the truth?”

“He did. The murderer was called Xue Yang.”

Upon the mention of this name however, frowns and glares appeared on nearly everyone’s faces. This was a dangerous cultivator that no one ever wanted to cross paths with.

Xue Yang had developed a hatred that lasted for years toward Chang Ping’s father. He committed this crime in vengeance. Xiao Xingchen brought him over to the Discussion Conference in Jinling Tower and demanded severe punishment. However, the Jins’ opposed.

A female cultivator shouted her opinion, “We should have known something fishy was going on with the Jin sect when they wanted to pardon Xue Yang. Truly ridiculous that Jin Guangshan had gotten away with that.”

Sect Leader Yao stuttered a response, knowing he was one of the sects that hadn’t opposed Jin Guangshan’s decision, “Sect Leader Jin was just so powerful at the time. I’m sure any cultivator who opposed him before would be met with great damage to their sect.”

“And so you would rather let the murderer of a dozen innocent lives run loose?” Another cultivator piped up, glaring at him with contempt.

Wei Wuxian questioned, “Objecting in such a situation would be placing itself against the entire world. Could it be that Xue Yang was a favorite with Jin Guangshan?”

Lan Wangji replied, “A guest disciple.”

Wei Wuxian wondered why and Lan Wangji told him it was because of the Stygian Tiger Seal.

“For a chance to control countless corpses and spirits, Jin Guangshan would abuse his power and hide cultivators like Xue Yang in his sect.” The same female cultivator shook her head in disgust, “How is he any better than a demonic cultivator?”

Wei Wuxian applauded, “Excellent points.”

Then she side-glanced Wei Wuxian and said, “But you’re not any better for creating it in the first place. You should have destroyed it with you when you died.”

He winced, knowing it was partially true. He had been planning to completely destroy it but then the siege happened and he could only get to half of it before dying. However, when he came back, he didn’t even think about the seal again. It was his own arrogance for believing that only destroying half of it would be enough to keep anyone from using it, since he didn’t think anyone out there could have the same materials as him to recreate it.

Wei Wuxian sighed, rueful thoughts now filling his mind. He only felt marginally better when Lan Wangji slid a hand against his and intertwined their fingers.

Xue Yang could actually rebuild the other half of the seal! When the Lanling Jin Sect discovered his brilliance, they protected him in exchange for him restoring the seal. Xue Yang might have been testing the seal’s powers on the Chang Clan. Wei Wuxian could almost

imagine those cultivators clenching their teeth, "That Wei Wuxian! If he didn't make this, our world wouldn't have encountered so many disasters!!!"

That was exactly what a number of them thought, especially Sect Leader Yang. He harrumphed, "Well, isn't it true? That abomination took countless lives."

"That abomination helped you win against the Wens." Jiang Cheng reminded, turning his head slightly, "Or should I remind you how bleak our situation was before Wei Wuxian gave us a way out."

"Then he shouldn't have kept it for himself and looked down on others just because he was more powerful with it." Sect Leader Yang strongly argued.

Wei Wuxian laughed, "And who exactly could I trust such a tool to that wouldn't just use it for their own gains? The current Chief at that time? Jin Guangshan?" He shook his head and continued, "I did wish that I hadn't only destroyed half of it back then, but well thanks to your siege, it ruined my plans."

However, Xiao Xingchen didn't waver. With Nie Mingjue who learned about this, he refused to tolerate Xue Yang no matter what. In the end, the LanlingJin Sect could only give in.

Images flashed on the screen as Lan Wangji recounted the past, and the moment Nie Mingjue was shown, Nie Huaisang couldn't help but utter a "Dage!" His eyes were shining on the picture of his stern brother whom he missed so much.

The Lanling Jin Sect just shut Xue Yang into the dungeons and after hearing this, Nie Mingjue was enraged and pressed on them again. But, shortly afterward, Nie Mingjue passed away from Qi deviation, and Jin Guangshan started to try as hard as he could to get Xue Yang out of the dungeons.

Lan Xichen closed his eyes after seeing the image of Nie Mingjue covered in blood. His heart twinged with pain as he recalled how he'd indirectly had a hand to his sworn brother's death.

The Lanling Jin Sect successfully pressured Chang Ping into correcting his words. Xiao Xingchen visited him to inquire upon the matter, but Chang Ping was just helpless. After Xue Yang had been released, he started to take revenge against Xiao Xingchen's closest friend, Song Lan. Xue Yang wiped out the Baixue Temple where Song Lan grew up and blinded Song Lan's eyes.

At this point, Wei Wuxian wondered why Lan Wangji hadn't done anything to Xue Yang back then? Then a memory of Lan Wangji's back scars came to mind. He had probably been grounded for a few years.

Wei Wuxian dropped his gaze and didn't look at Lan Wangji as his thought process was voiced for his husband to hear. He couldn't help but think this was his fault again. If Lan Wangji hadn't been stuck recuperating for three years and had managed to help Xiao Xingcheng, would the outcome have been different now? Would Xiao Xingcheng had lived, and he and Song Lang had created that sect they both wished for?

Seeming to sense his thoughts wandering again, Lan Wangji rubbed his thumb over Wei Wuxian's knuckles and told him, "Not your fault."

Wei Wuxian looked at his husband with surprise, before smiling slowly, "You don't even know what I'm thinking, Lan Zhan."

Lan Wangji simply replied, "Your face says it." Then he squeezed their joined hands and Wei Wuxian squeezed back.

Xiao Xingchen broke his vow to his teacher and carried Song Lan back to Baoshan Sanren's residence, asking her to save his friend. When she agreed, Xiao Xingchen left the mountain and was never seen again. A year later, Song Lan also left the mountain and could see again because Xiao Xingchen offered his own eyes.

Everyone's eyes widened at the sight of a woman's back that was shown when Xiao Xingchen went up the mountain. Countless thoughts started racing people's minds from: 'Baoshan Sanren is real? She's not a legend?!' to 'Where could I find this mountain and see this immortal?!'

Wei Wuxian was especially stunned to have caught a glimpse of the immortal cultivator who had been his mother's master before.

At this time, Jin Guangyao had taken over the Lanling Jin Sect as Sect Leader, and he got rid of Xue Yang. Song Lan went to search for his past friend's whereabouts and was never heard of again.

Wei Wuxian sighed softly. He thought, 'If Xiao Xingchen was born a few years earlier or if I died a few years later, things wouldn't have had to be like this. If I was alive, how would I have not taken part in the matter? How would I have not made friends with such a person?'

Then he laughed at himself bitterly. 'I would've done something? What could I have done? If I was still alive back then, perhaps the Yueyang Chang Sect's case didn't even need to be investigated before everyone decided that I did it. If the Daozhang Xiao Xingchen bumped into me on the streets and I chatted with him, invite him to drink together, it's likely that he'd hit me with his horsetail whisk, haha.'

Wei Wuxian slightly smiled. He still thought the same way his past-self did.

They had already walked past the Chang Residence, and reached a cemetery nearby. Wei Wuxian asked, "Then, why did Chang Ping die afterward? Who killed the remaining members of his clan?"

Before Lan Wangji could answer, a series of bangs was heard. Their faces immediately changed. This was the slamming on coffins in the Chang Clan's cemetery that the liquor shop's waiter talked about.

The juniors jumped at the sudden noise, their faces showing a bit of fright.

“Oh come on now, I thought you’d grown stronger to such things?” Wei Wuxian teased them.

“I-It was just surprising, Senior Wei.” A cultivator from the Baling Ouyang sect stuttered.

“That’s kinda the point.” Wei Wuxian chuckled. Seeing their adorably frightened faces made him much calmer now.

Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji both softened their breathing and stealthily moved without making a sound. Propping themselves against the pillars of the pailou, they both saw that, in the center of the cemetery, there was a hole amid the tombstones. Someone was digging out a grave.

Before an hour passed, two people hopped up from inside the opened grave. The gravedigger suddenly spun around and saw them. There was a mass of thick, black mist over the man’s face.

“Ah, who’s that?!” Jin Ling exclaimed.

Lan Wangji had already unsheathed Bichen, darted into the cemetery, and started the fight. With a corpse on his back, the gravedigger fought in a strange way.

The faces of the Gusu Lan juniors suddenly changed. These were… these were the fighting styles from the Gusu Lan sect!

“Hey, who’s that guy copying our moves?” Lan Jingyi asked in an angry huff, glaring at the gravedigger.

Even Lan Xichen’s eyes were a little icy, already having an idea of who this person was.

The gravedigger suddenly fished out a Transportation Talisman! Wei Wuxian tried to halt him with corpses and his flute. Because of this, the gravedigger accidentally released the corpse he was carrying, and Lan Wangji took it. Realizing his defeat, he beat a hasty escape with the talisman.

Wei Wuxian walked over to Lan Wangji and found out the head and the legs of the corpse were fake. Wei Wuxian discovered that only its chest and abdomen felt firm and real which meant this was the missing torso of the arm and legs.

“So if he was after Chifeng-Zun’s torso, then that gravedigger must have been one of Jin Guangyao’s lackeys.” Ouyang Zizhen said.

Lan Jingyi sneered, “Then that was definitely Su She.”

Wei Wuxian wondered how this gravedigger knew the Gusu Lan sect’s fighting style and asked Lan Wangji if he knew the person. But Lan Wangji didn’t and Wei Wuxian believed him. They made their way back to the liquor shop.

The young waiter kept the store open for them, and with Lan Wangji, Wei Wuxian walked back to the table they sat during the day. With liquor jars around him, Wei Wuxian went back

to the topic of Chang Ping's death.

Lan Wangji continued the explanation with simple, direct words. Many years after the incident, Chang Ping and the remainder of his clan's members died overnight due to lingchi. Moreover, Chang Ping's eyes were dug out. Nobody could find out who the murderer was, but it could be verified that the sword used had been Xiao Xingchen's sword, Shuanghua.

Wei Wuxian was shocked but with no way to find Xiao Xingchen, Lan Wangji merely said, "One should not comment without understanding the whole picture."

Many juniors nodded after hearing this. "A good lesson that a lot of people should learn," Lan Jingyi said, a bit pointedly.

Wei Wuxian looked up at Lan Wangji and smiled, "You're right. Before knowing all of the turns and twists, causes and effects, nobody should presume anything about anything. I only ordered five jars, but you bought five more jars for me, so I'm afraid I won't be able to finish all of them by myself. How about if you drink with me? This isn't the Cloud Recesses, so it doesn't violate anything, right?"

When the Gusu Lan juniors heard this, they all turned to Lan Qiren who looked as if he wished he'd heard nothing. Letting out a sigh, he promptly said, "The rules are not there in Cloud Recesses to forbid cultivators from being unruly in the sect, but to learn proper manners and apply it to their everyday lives."

Which meant to say was that even outside Cloud Recesses, Gusu Lan disciples were meant to follow through with their teachings.

However...

Lan Wangji replied, "Very well," while pushing his cup forward.

'You don't give your uncle a single face at all!' Lan Qiren shouted inwardly, while his face remained passive like a stone.

Lan Wangji bowed to his uncle with his arms bent in front of him, saying, "I apologize, Uncle." He didn't say anymore afterwards, not an offer to change or a reason as to why. Lan Wangji knew his uncle understood his actions (somewhat) anyway and was just apologizing for the sake of giving Lan Qiren some face.

Lan Qiren huffed in what might have been an acknowledgement. Lan Xichen kept to himself while smiling at both his uncle and brother's stubborn attitudes.

Wei Wuxian clicked his tongue, "Hanguang-Jun, you really have changed. Before, I drank a tiny jar in front of you, and you got so mad. You even threw me off the wall and hit me. Now, though, you're hiding jars of Emperor's Smile in your room and secretly drinking."

Fixing his collars, he answered in a calm voice, "I did not touch any jar of Emperor's Smile."

Lan Xichen looked down briefly with a smile, thinking to himself, ‘if it were anyone else but him, people would truly believe it. But Lan Xichen knew his brother and had seen his brother indeed get drunk from an Emperor’s Smile, all because he couldn’t forget about a boy who loved to drink.’

Wei Wuxian was now pondering the same thing. Since Lan Wangji had told him how he got the mark on his chest, he knew that Lan Zhan must have lied, or at least found a loophole in referring to the jars under his floorboards. However Wei Wuxian wasn’t mad. On the contrary, he felt a little guilty that his husband resorted to drinking for comfort when Wei Wuxian died. Though he was glad it wasn’t an occurring habit.

With that thought, Wei Wuxian embraced Lan Wangji’s arm and snuggled close to his side.

Wei Wuxian asked, “Why did you hide them if you’re not drinking anything? Saving them for me? Fine, fine. You didn’t touch them. I’ll believe you, okay? Let’s talk about something else. Come. I really need to see just how many cups would it take to make an abstinent disciple of the Gusu Lan Sect drunk.”

“Of course, he hid them for you.” Tang Tang reacted emotionally, holding her hands to her chest.

“I’m so dumb for ignoring the signs long ago.” Fei Fei bemoaned, remembering how much she refused to go along with Tang Tang’s imaginations before.

Tang Tang laughed and patted her on the shoulder, “It’s okay. You got there eventually.”

He poured a bowl for Lan Wangji who drank it up. Wei Wuxian stared at his face in excitement but after some time, neither Lan Wangji’s face color or expression changed, staring at him calmly with light-colored eyes. Wei Wuxian frowned thinking, ‘So Lan Zhan’s this good with alcohol?’

Even the juniors, especially the disciples from Gusu Lan, were watching avidly at Hanguang-Jun’s expressions.

Jiang Cheng looked on with half-concealed curiosity. How would the most talented and respected member of the Lan clan act while drunk?

Meanwhile, Lan Qichen pursed his lips, unsure if he was ready to see this disaster in the making. Maybe closing his eyes would help regulate his Qi better.

But then Lan Wangji frowned and lightly rubbed between his brows. After a few moments, with a hand supporting his forehead, he closed his eyes. Wei Wuxian curiosity waved at Lan Wangji, then clapped beside his ears. No reaction.

Wei Wuxian then thought with a completely dazzled expression, ‘He’s asleep?! I can’t believe he’s asleep!’ He put a hand over his mouth as he stared at Lan Wangji , ‘Most people get drunk before they fall asleep, so how could Lan Zhan skip the getting drunk step? But ‘drunk’ was exactly the step I wanted to see… can’t believe he’s so bad with alcohol.’

Everyone who had been anticipating it either groaned in disappointment or shook their heads in amusement. At least Lan Wangji still retained his dignity as a cultivator while drunk.

Wei Wuxian chuckled similarly as his past-self, peeking at Lan Wangji to see his reaction.

There were still no big changes to his expression yet, but there will be later on.

Which… now that Wei Wuxian thought of it, did he do something he shouldn't have when Lan Zhan was drunk the first time? He knew he was going to have to come up with ways to stop the screen from showing the more intimate things they did in future drunk moments, but the first time shouldn't have had anything personal happen… right?

Wei Wuxian put Lan Wangji's right arm around his arm, and dragged him out of the liquor shop. After taking out the pouch containing money, he found an inn and asked for two rooms. He carried Lan Wangji to one of the rooms, took off his boots, tucked him in. He then slipped into the night.

Lan Wangji slightly relaxed his shoulders. Somehow, he was relieved to see that he did nothing more while drunk around Wei Ying since his experience that one time in Cloud Recesses… hadn't been pleasant for a number of reasons.

Wei Wuxian played his flute in a desolate area, wondering how Wen Ning was doing. With the sound of jingles, Wen Ning appeared from the shadows. Wei Wuxian put his hands behind him and slowly paced around Wen Ning. Wen Ning shifted, as if wanting to follow his steps and walk in circles as well. Wei Wuxian commanded, "Stand properly."

"You know, if Senior Wei had a dog, he could be a good trainer." A junior said in a wondering tone. "It's too bad he's scared of them though."

Wei Wuxian suddenly shuddered, feeling as if someone had just said something chilling about him.

When Wei Wuxian inspected his hand, he noticed the chains on Wen Ning weren't ordinary chains. 'Turned to ashes? Trying as hard as they could to restore a damaged piece of Stygian Tiger Seal, of course some sects salivated at the Ghost General as well. How would they have been willing to turn him to ashes?'

A rogue cultivator sneered, "The greed of clans really knows no bounds." He even threw a look at certain sects.

Sect Leader Yao, who felt his gaze, bristled and indignantly said, "None of the clans here would be as shameless and greedy as Jin Guangshan and his son, Jin Guangyao."

"Sure, make the Lanling Jin Sect your scapegoats while the rest of you who had similar thoughts for the Stygian Tiger Seal revel in the fact that your own plans hadn't pushed through and be caught in a dilemma instead." The rogue cultivator huffed.

"You—You—" Sect Leader Yao's face went red as he pointed to this nameless person, "Who are you to dare speak this way to an elder, much more a respected Sect Leader? Have you no

manners or principles?"

The rogue cultivator curled his lips and looked away. He drawled, "You're not worthy to know it."

Sect Leader Yang looked like he would qi deviate right then and there. His senior disciples immediately helped him calm down while everyone's attention turned back to the screen.

With a bitter laugh, he stood by Wen Ning's side. After considering for a moment, he started to press his fingers into Wen Ning's hair. He thought that the person who kept and restrained Wen Ning must have prevented him from thinking on his own. To make him listen to other people's orders, Wen Ning's sanity must have been destroyed, which meant that they must've planted something inside his head.

Lan Sizhui looked at his uncle sadly, hating how he experienced such hardships in his life.

Wei Wuxian pinched both needle ends at the same time and gradually pulled two black, long nails from within Wen Ning's skull. They were around an inch long and as thick as the red strings used for jade pendants. As soon as the nails left his head, Wen Ning's features quivered faintly.

"What curious things." Liu Dazhong murmured with scrunched brows, then shook his head, "I believe Xue Yang was the creator of this? If the Ghost General had been hidden by the Jins this entire time, then Xue Yang had all that time to experiment on him."

"That's…" One of the Nanhu Liu disciples started, feeling pity emerge in his heart for the living corpse.

When Wen Ning heard this, he bowed his head slightly, feeling sad but also relieved that he didn't have any memories from that time.

Putting them away, Wei Wuxian looked down at the chains on Wen Ning's wrists and ankles, thinking to himself that it'd be a bit inconvenient for them to hang around and make noise. He'd need to use a cultivational sword to cut them off. Lan Wangji's Bichen came to mind.

A cultivator sputtered, "Using a spiritual cultivation sword to just cut some chains?"

Wei Wuxian shrugged, "Hey if I had my own sword, I would have used that to remove the chains from Wen Ning. I wasn't going to let him walk around with those noisy things around."

"And Lan Zhan doesn't mind, right?" He grinned at his husband who nodded slightly.

Wei Wuxian thought to himself, 'Okay. I'll go back to the inn first. If Lan Zhan is awake, then I won't do anything. If Lan Zhan is still asleep, I'll quickly borrow Bichen for a while.'

He turned around and found Lan Wangji standing right behind him.

"Oh no." Tang Tang said, at the same time as Li Li gasped and Fei Fei went, "He's in trouble now."

Ling Bao squinted at the screen and asked, “But… I thought he was asleep?”

“Maybe his Wei Wuxian senses tingled and he realized his future husband wasn’t in the room with him, so he woke up and searched.” Tang Tang created a scenario on the spot, her eyes twinkling.

Chapter End Notes

lord this was so long.... (@Д@；this chapter is like worth two updates (for this week and the week i missed) so... see you next week!

Next chapter: more drunk lwj!!!

to answer a few questions: no, mianmian is not here. she wasn't there during the burial mound siege so she didn't get a letter
(σ˚∀˚)σ

also whether i'll add something that's not already written in the novel (like if it's something only shown in audio drama, manhua, donghua or untamed), that's something i'm not willing to spoil （＾ｖ＾） you'll have to wait and see~

UPDATE: chapter 32 taking a bit longer cos there's so many reactions to put and i wanna make it good XD;; lksdfl hopefully will be up by monday!

Dew IV

Chapter Notes

> i have an announcement at the end of this chap so don't forget to check it out after reading~
>
> Now enjoy the drunk lwj reactions!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Wei Wuxian internally panicked, 'Ahh! How long has Lan Zhan been here for? Wouldn't it be awkward if he was never drunk in the beginning and followed me all the way here? I didn't mention Wen Ning at all when he was awake, and I snuck out as soon as he fell asleep to summon him!'

"After all the times he tried sneaking away from Hanguang-Jun…" Lan Jingyi slowly shook his head. "Senior Wei never learns."

Lan Sizhui turned to look at him strangely, "Didn't you still sneak past curfew despite being caught by Hanguang-Jun multiple times, Jingyi?"

Lan Jingyi was affronted. "Hey, at least, I stopped."

"After you were punished for the 20th time." Lan Sizhui countered, snorting at Jingyi's sullen look.

"So *is* Hanguang-Jun not drunk?" Jin Ling asked, looking confused.

Ouyang Zizhen shrugged. "Maybe after sleeping a little, all the alcohol has been absorbed in his golden core. I heard powerful cultivators can do that."

The juniors looked amazed at the thought of that. "Maybe that's how Senior Wei stays level-headed." Jin Ling wondered aloud, glancing at Wei Wuxian.

"Nah, didn't you see Senior Wei drinking like a master even when he was our age?" Lan Jingyi reminded. "It's just a Senior Wei thing."

Lan Wangji crossed his arms in front of him with a stiff face. Wei Wuxian hesitantly said, "Ah Hanguang-Jun."

Lan Wangji did not reply. He walked a few steps toward Wen Ning with a sword in hand. Wei Wuxian thought, 'Oh no. Don't tell me that Lan Zhan really pretended to be drunk so that he could kill Wen Ning after I summoned him. Of course. Nobody actually gets drunk after just a bowl.'

Wei Wuxian scratched his chin with a finger, feeling awkward and amused at his own panicky thoughts. “I’ve just never seen anyone get drunk so fast, Lan Zhan.”

“Wei Ying doesn’t need to explain.” Lan Wangji said comfortingly. He still had yet to gain Wei Wuxian’s full trust at this point, so it wasn’t surprising that he was scared at what he’d do to his friend. Still, it sat uncomfortably in the back of his mind, reminding him again how much he’d failed Wei Wuxian in the past.

Meanwhile, a cultivator in brown robes spoke confidently, “He’s not drunk.”

Wei Wuxian blurted, “Hanguang-Jun, listen to me…”

With a loud smack, Lan Wangji hit Wen Ning.

Wen Ning only staggered a few steps backward after the blow. He stood properly with a blank face. Lan Wangji pushed Wen Ning again to about thirty feet away and said in an annoyed tone, “Leave.”

Several people stared in shock. Wasn’t Hanguang-Jun acting a bit too… childish here?

Lan Qiren covered his face with one hand, sighing into it already.

A cultivator in grey robes squinted, saying doubtfully to the one in brown robes, “Are you sure he’s not drunk? I doubt Hanguang-Jun would use his hands in a fight.”

“Maybe Hanguang-Jun is just a silent drunk.” Another one suggested.

“I’m telling you he’s not drunk, he’s just…” The cultivator in brown robes stuttered, before continuing, “just mad that the Ghost General is talking to his lover.”

“Or maybe he *is* drunk, and it’s making him reveal his more jealous side.”

One of them snorted, “What is this, a love story? They’re not even together here yet.”

“Excuse me?” Tang Tang couldn’t help but cut in, seeing as this group of men were talking near her area. “There’s obviously love blossoming between them already, and even if they’re not together yet, Hanguang-Jun is most definitely in love with Wei Wuxian.”

“Why else is he pushing the Ghost General away from him? Like that esteemed gentleman said, Hanguang-Jun is *jealous.* ”

“It’s all in his actions! Are we even watching the same thing?”

Fei Fei and the rest supported Tang Tang with their own arguments, making the group of men fall silent and wonder what they did to offend these people.

Wei Wuxian finally noticed that something was wrong. Lan Wangji turned around and walked over to Wei Wuxian who looked at him scrutinizingly. He looked down and found that Lan Wangji’s boots were put on the wrong feet.

“Oh.” The cultivator in brown robes said, “So maybe he is drunk.”

His companion in grey robes couldn’t even say ‘I told you so’ because Hanguang-Jun walking around with boots on the wrong foot? Something dumb like that could never have been associated to someone like him.

Most of the female cultivators found it endearing, though Yu Nianzhen could care less if Hanguang-Jun was drunk or not.

On the other hand, the Gusu Lan juniors were dumbfounded. “H-Hanguang-Jun?!”

“He’s actually drunk?!” Lan Jingyi reacted, feeling horrified but at the same time fascinated to see it happen.

“I knew those rumors about the Lan clan being weak against alcohol were true!” A junior from the Lanling Jin sect exclaimed. The other younger disciples turned to him with weird looks.

Lan Xichen was a bit apprehensive watching this after seeing his brother getting drunk once.

Wei Wuxian asked tentatively, “Hanguang-Jun, what number is this?”

With a clang, Bichen fell to the ground as Lan Wangji reached his hands out. With one on the left and one on the right, he solemnly wrapped his hands around both of Wei Wuxian’s fingers.

Wei Wuxian, “…” ‘This definitely isn’t the normal Lan Zhan!’

Even the people watching agreed and had nothing to say.

Meanwhile, Lan Wangji was seriously pondering his actions as a drunk. For now, it seemed he was being controlled by his own feelings for Wei Ying so he was acting less rationally than he’d ought to be. It was a little embarrassing, truth be told, to have everyone and his uncle, watch him without any inhibitions, but if Wei Wuxian wasn’t panicking beside him, then nothing too bad should have happened. Right?

“Hanguang-Jun, are you drunk?”

“No.”

Wei Wuxian took his fingers back while Lan Wangji maintained his gesture, both hands raised in loose fists. Wei Wuxian picked up Bichen as he thought, ‘I’ve had countless drinking buddies and I’ve seen thousands of drinking antics. But it’s the first time I’ve seen someone like Lan Wangji, who doesn’t make a fuss at all and holds up a straight face while doing weird acts.’

“Even drunk, Hanguang-Jun is still Hanguang-Jun.” Ouyang Zizhen said admiringly.

Lan Jingyi nodded, still a bit dazed. “Yeah, drunk people do much worse than just putting on their shoes wrong.”

“Or being jealous at a corpse your future spouse is talking to.” Jin Ling added a little sarcastically. “Imagine if he had a whole jar of wine. I wonder what kind of monster that would create.”

“Something the world isn’t ready for.” Lan Sizhui replied, looking grave.

Wei Wuxian held Lan Wangji’s hand. “Okay. Let’s go back.”

Behind them, Wen Ning silently followed. Lan Wangji whirled around and angrily smacked him on Wen Ning’s head.

Lan Sizhui winced, feeling conflicted over seeing two of his most favorite people not getting along here. At least Hanguang-Jun wasn’t using his full power, and Uncle Wen Ning wasn’t going berserk…

Wei Wuxian had a hard time suppressing his chuckles right now. Was Lan Zhan really drinking a lot of vinegar that night? He didn’t think he could be *that* jealous over Wen Ning!

Wei Wuxian grabbed Lan Wangji’s arm, “What are you hitting him for?”

Lan Wangji spoke to Wen Ning in a threatening tone, “Go away!”

Wei Wuxian hurried, “Okay, okay. It’s up to you. I’ll make him go away if that’s what you want.” As he spoke, he took out his bamboo flute. But Lan Wangji quickly grabbed it, “Do not play for him.”

Wei Wuxian couldn’t stop himself. He turned to bury his face on Lan Wangji’s shoulder and giggled. “Lan Zhan, you’re so cute drunk.”

“Mm.” Lan Wangji instinctively answered, feeling slightly horrified to see how territorial he was as a drunk. He knew himself well, and his jealousy and protectiveness over Wei Wuxian wasn’t something he was surprised about anymore. He just felt betrayed that all his years of self-control had gone down the drain by a single sip of alcohol. He wondered if there was a way to become immune to it.

Wei Wuxian teased, “Why are you so pushy?”

Lan Wangji repeated angrily, “Do not play for him!”

Wei Wuxian assumed that since Lan Zhan had never been too fond of demonic techniques, maybe he didn’t like how he used his flute to control Wen Ning.

“And this is the part when it’s not funny.” Wei Wuxian said, shaking his head at his own thoughts.

“Wow.” Jiang Cheng commented, feeling amazed at his martial brother’s level of obliviousness. “You may be the dumbest idiot for not taking a single hint yet, but I am impressed at how many excuses you can come up with.”

Wei Wuxian rolled his eyes, “As if *you’d* be able to take a hint if someone drunk acted like that towards you.”

“I *know* I wouldn’t be.”

“Yeah, you keep telling yourself that.”

“Alright. I’m only going to play for you, okay?”

Lan Wangji said, “Mm.”

“Aww, look at his face!” Li Li gasped, feeling giddy.

Ling Bao sighed, “It’s so soft.”

“He’s so easily satisfied by Wei Wuxian’s words.” Tang Tang agreed.

“Sad that Wei Wuxian is only saying that to appease him.” Fei Fei commented, ruining the mood.

Wei Wuxian told Wen Ning, and the Ghost General left dejectedly. Wei Wuxian turned to Lan Wangji, “Lan Zhan, why doesn’t your face flush at all when you’re drunk?”

Unexpectedly Lan Wangji reached out and pulled him into his arms. Wei Wuxian’s head slammed right against his chest.

Tang Tang and her group of friends grasped whoever was closest to them and shook them in excitement, eyes bright and glued to the screen. They all nearly squealed out loud. Ling Bao had a hand covering his mouth. They couldn’t believe how bold drunk Hanguang-Jun was.

There were even a few female cultivators whose hearts thumped at such a move. If only their future husband could do something like that to them too.

Lan Wangji’s voice came from above, “The heartbeats.”

“What?”

“The face doesn’t show anything. Listen to the heartbeats.”

His chest vibrated from his low voice. A heart pulsated steadily and continuously. Thump, thump. Wei Wuxian thought, ‘His heart does seem to be beating a little fast…”

Not only were the juniors blushing red, most of the cultivators were feeling awkward as well. Lan Wangji’s heartbeat had echoed throughout the cave, making it so that nobody couldn’t have heard it's slightly quickening tempo.

They almost unanimously thought, ‘We get that you’re in love already! Stop stating the obvious and feeding us dog food over and over again!’

Wei Wuxian blushed as he remembered this. Lan Wangji didn’t, but he wasn't as surprised about it. He showed through his actions his love for Wei Wuxian, after all.

Even Nie Huaisang was slightly red behind his fan. He wondered if Hanguang-Jun and Wei-xiong would let him write a book inspired by their love story…?

However, Lan Xichen’s expression went soft. Did Lan Wangji remember how mother used to hold them to her chest and listen to her heartbeat when they were young?

Wei Wuxian looked up again, “I won’t be able to tell from your face unless I listen to your heartbeats?”

Lan Wangji answered sincerely, “Mnn.”

Wei Wuxian bent over in laughter.

‘Is Lan Wangji’s face so thick that the blush can’t even be seen? He isn’t this sort of person, is he? And he’s so honest after he’s drunk. Wouldn’t it be a waste if I don’t tease him?’ Wei Wuxian smirked.

“Of course, you’d take advantage of this.” Lan Qiren muttered with a click of his tongue.

But Wei Wuxian reassured Lan Wangji, “I only asked harmless questions, nothing too invasive.” Having his little tricks exposed made him nervous. Ah, why did he have to do this thinking Lan Zhan would never know… now the whole cultivation world knew!

He hurried Lan Wangji back to the inn. Entering the room, he held him down on the bed and took off the boots that were put on wrong. He then took off Lan Wangji’s forehead ribbon, and brought in a basin of hot water along with a towel. Wei Wuxian started gently rubbing Lan Wangji’s face. He stared at Wei Wuxian without even blinking. Wei Wuxian brushed a finger under Lan Wangji’s chin. “Why are you looking at me? Am I pretty?”

"He is pretty." Ling Bao acknowledged with a nod.

"Careful that you're not heard by the husband." Fei Fei warned with a snort.

"You're pretty good looking too, Bao Bao." Li Li said.

"So you should get an attractive husband too." Tang Tang added with a wink. Ling Bao could only look away, flustered.

“See? Who asks that?” Jiang Cheng reacted, gesturing to the screen. Even Wei Wuxian was oblivious to his own crush.

"Senior Wei just keeps poking at the dragon." Ouyang Zizhen said, finding it amusing now as he watched.

"A drunk dragon who's even more unpredictable." Jin Ling agreed.

Before Lan Wangji could answer, Wei Wuxian tossed the towel into the basin, "Your face is clean now. Do you want to have some water first?"

He turned around only to see Lan Wangji holding the basin in his hands, his face already buried inside.

"Oh gods." Lan Jingyi covered his eyes, feeling as if his pristine image of Hanguang-Jun was getting tarnished.

Wei Wuxian patted Lan Wangji's back in a comforting manner. "Don't worry, you didn't drink any of it… I think."

Wei Wuxian grabbed the basin and moved it away at once, "I didn't mean the water in here!"

Lan Wangji raised his head calmly. Did he drink the water or did he not? Hopefully Lan Zhan doesn't remember anything after he wakes up. Or else, for the rest of his life, he wouldn't be able to face anyone.

Lan Wangji, right now, had an admittedly awkward look. Wei Wuxian felt bad that he never told him about any of this, but he did it to save his face!

Wei Wuxian continued to say, "It's alright, Lan Zhan. Lots of people do weird things while drunk. Heck there was that one time, Jiang Cheng jumped into a river—"

"Wei Wuxian!" Jiang Cheng shouted, face aflame, "You said you'd never repeat that story!"

"Did I?" Wei Wuxian placed a finger to his mouth, unable to recall saying such a thing.

Wei Wuxian used his sleeves to wipe off the drops of water on Lan Wangji's jaw and put his arms around him, "Hanguang-Jun, are you going to do whatever I tell you to do?"

Lan Wangji, "Mnn."

"You'll answer whatever I ask you?"

"Mn."

Wei Wuxian put one knee on the bed and smirked, "Okay. Let me ask you. Have you… secretly tasted the Emperor's Smile you hid in your room?"

Lan Wangji, "No."

Wei Wuxian clicked his tongue. "I shouldn't have been so specific."

Lan Zhan side-eyed him.

"I-I mean… I should not have done this at all." Wei Wuxian amended, grinning sweetly at his husband.

Do you like rabbits?"

“Yes.”

“Have you ever violated any rules before?”

“Yes.”

“Have you ever liked anyone?”

“Yes.”

“Does anyone else realize that all of Hanguang-Jun's answers are actually because of Wei Wuxian?” A female cultivator pointed out to her friends, feeling amused.

“Yeah, yeah." One of them said, waving a flippant hand, "He likes rabbits because of him. He most likely violated rules for him, and he’s also the person he likes.”

"Ah young love." An older woman commented.

Wei Wuxian covered his mouth, feeling amused. ‘So he really does answer whatever question I ask huh? Then now we can cut to the chase…’ He continued, “How about Jiang Cheng?”

Lan Wangji frown, “Hmph.”

Jiang Cheng frowned and made a similar sound.

Yu Nianzhen rolled her eyes. “Mature.”

“How about Wen Ning?”

Wen Ning tilted his head.

Lan Wangji looked indifferent, “Huh.”

Wen Ning nodded. Lan Sizhui looked a little amused, and was inwardly relieved that there hadn't been any hard feelings back then.

Wei Wuxian grinned and pointed at himself, “How about this one?”

Lan Wangji answered, “Mine.”

“...”

Everyone in the cave: “....”

Lan Wangji stared at him and slowly stated, “Mine.”

Tang Tang blushed, her hands to her cheeks, “Wow, Hanguang-Jun is really…”

“Even drunk, he’s smooth.” Fei Fei said, fanning herself.

Ling Bao said, "Look at how strong his desire is for Wei Wuxian. He doesn't just say an Mm or Yes. It's *mine.* " Then he proceeded to swoon.

Meanwhile, Wei Wuxian was burying his face against Lan Wangji's chest, already trying to hide from his embarrassment. He continuously muttered, "I can't believe myself. I can't believe myself."

Lan Wangji placed a hand over his head, confused. If he'd confessed at this point, how hadn't Wei Wuxian known he liked him already?

Wei Wuxian suddenly pointed to Bichen behind himself, "Huh? You mean Bichen?"

There were collective groans of "oh for heaven's sake!" and "is he serious?!" that went around the cave. People who hadn't been interested in their love life before were suddenly fed up over Wei Wuxian's astonishing ability to divert all forms of love hints into something else.

Wei Wuxian didn't even want to look.

Lan Wangji just released a light, amused huff. So that's how it went.

'Lan Zhan is this obsessed with his sword?' Wei Wuxian thought.

"How is it so frustrating to listen to this when we already know they end up together?" Lan Jingyi said, exasperated.

"I think that's why. You can't help but think they'll get together right away, but Senior Wei…" Ouyang Zizhen sighed, as if he had no words.

He got off the bed and walked around the room with Bichen in his hand, from the left to the right. Lan Wangji's gaze closely followed wherever he walked.

"He even experimented??"

"I can't watch this anymore."

The cultivators' thoughts were half exasperated and half amused.

Wei Wuxian lifted Bichen in front of his eyes, "You want it?"

"I want it."

Lan Wangji grasped the hand that Wei Wuxian held Bichen with and stared into his eyes. Taking in a soft breath, he repeated his words, "… I want it."

"Dunk Lan Zhan was so forward, I just realized." Wei Wuxian said, peeking behind his shoulder to watch now.

"Clearly." Jiang Cheng muttered. Even he was suffering, sitting through Wei Wuxian's ignorance to Lan Wangji's want for him.

Wei Wuxian thought to himself, 'Oh Heavens, this is too much! Lan Zhan, what a person… If he's so sincere, enthusiastic towards a girl, then what a formidable man he'd be!'

"Finally he's affected," Jin Ling exclaimed.

"At least Hanguang-Jun's efforts weren't in vain." Ouyang Zizhen said, snickering.

Wei Wuxian asked again, "How did you recognize me? Why did you help me?"

Lan Wangji opened his mouth. Wei Wuxian shifted a bit closer, "Hm?" However, Lan Wangji's expression suddenly changed. With a shove, he pushed Wei Wuxian onto the bed, and the candlelight was snuffed out with a wave of his hand.

"Lan Zhan?!"

A certain group of three girls and one boy could no longer hold it in and they screamed at the top of their lungs. Luckily, they weren't the only ones.

"Oh my heavens?!"

"Is this really necessary? Do we have to watch this?"

"They are so handsome together!"

"I have had enough of all this cut-sleeve business!"

"Nobody wants you here to see it either!"

"Somebody please tell me when it's okay to look again."

"Nothing happens!" Wei Wuxian said before Lan Zhan's reputation was further ruined. Now, he just had to plot how to make them not see the second occurrence of drunk Lan Wangji…

Lan Wangji tapped Wei Wuxian's back so he couldn't move, and he laid down, putting a blanket over them. "It is nine. Rest."

'So it's the scary bedtime routine of the Gusu Lan Sect.' Wei Wuxian wryly thought.

Lan Wangji was pleased that his body still knew to follow that at least.

Wei Wuxian stared at the ceiling, "Can't we rest and chat at the same time?"

"No."

Wei Wuxian pleaded, "Lan Zhan. Remove it. I got us two rooms. We don't need to be crammed in the same bed." Lan Wangji's hand came over and started to slowly untie the ribbons holding his clothes together.

"There are children in here!"

"We're not children!" Jin Ling retaliated angrily.

"A-ling, cover your eyes." Jiang Cheng snapped.

Wei Wuxian wanted to face-palm. How many times did he have to say that, "Nothing happened!!"

Meanwhile, Lan Qiren just wanted to know when it would all stop, and he could look at his nephew with some face again. Sometimes there were some things close relatives didn't have to know about their family members …

Wei Wuxian exclaimed, "Okay! Enough! I didn't mean for you to remove it in this sense!!! Alright!!! Sure! I'm lying down and I'm sleeping!!!"

A dead silence filled the darkness.

Wei Wuxian spoke again, "I finally understand why your sect prohibits liquor. You collapse after just one bowl and can't tell good liquor from bad liquor. If everyone from the Lan Sect is like this when they're drunk, you deserve to be prohibited from drinking. Anyone who drinks should be beaten up."

Those under the Lan sect all looked at each other, unsure if they ever wanted to drink even a little liquor and become like Lan Wangji. Though they would most likely be less refined about it.

With closed eyes, Lan Wangji raised his hand and covered Wei Wuxian's mouth.

He shushed, "Shh."

Wei Wuxian thought, 'Ever since I came back, everytime I wanted to tease Lan Wangji like before, it always ended up being me digging my own grave. This shouldn't be, right?! Where exactly did I go wrong?!'

Jiang Cheng cleared his throat, "Do you want to hear my opinion?"

"Not really."

"Well fuck you too." He sneered.

Wei Wuxian snorted and wrylyl said, "I get it already, okay? I'm stupid and oblivious. How could I be so blind to not notice at all..."

"Wei Ying is not stupid." Lan Wangji immediately said, taking Wei Wuxian's downturn face to raise it and meet his eyes. "My actions were confusing you. I apologize. I know I shouldn't —"

"What? Lan Zhan, there's no need for *you* to say sorry. It's fine." Wei Wuxian smiled, raising his own hand to cup Lan Wangji's cheek, "Anyone with common sense could tell you liked me."

"Tell me about it." A cultivator side-commented before he was jabbed on the side and told to be quiet.

Wei Wuxian continued like nothing happened, "And I was starting to like you too, but I just couldn't see what was right in front of me because... because..."

"Shh," Lan Wangji cut him off, "We can talk about it later, Wei Ying."

Remembering they were in a room full of people just quietly listening in on them, Wei Wuxian nodded.

They continued watching the rest of the scene as it faded to black.

Chapter End Notes

Hope yall enjoyed that! Took me awhile to get through cos I was so busy 😅

Which brings me to say, I know this'll be disappointing to many but I will be taking a small break from this fic for the month of August (only). The reason is because I joined a fic fest for another ship and I wanna focus on writing there for now, but I'll be right back in September! Luckily I got to write until the drunk lwj scene at least hahaha

Until then! 😘

Dew V

Chapter Notes

I'm back!!! Did anyone miss this fic? Haha I saw some of yall commenting the moment it hit September, but I should have been clearer that I would update again on my usual schedule which is during the weekends~

Anyway hope you enjoy this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The scene opens to show the sun positioned at the sky, already at five in the morning. It swiftly cut to two people still lying in bed in an inn, but only Wei Wuxian was awake, still caught in the spell. Once it lifted, Wei Wuxian calmly began taking off his shirt inside the blanket and throwing it under the bed. Then, he pulled off Lan Wangji's sash belt and succeeded in yanking his shirt half-off.

"What is Senior Wei doing?" Jin Ling asked, hands halfway up to cover his face.

"I think…" Ouyang Zizhen started tentatively, "he's going to prank, Hanguang-Jun?"

"Whatever it is, I'm still not going to look." Lan Jingyi said, covering his eyes already. "I feel like I'm disrespecting Hanguang-Jun when he's being uhm… a-and it's bad enough we've seen him drunk."

The other Lan juniors felt the same, unwilling to look at Lan Wangji while in a state of undress.

On the other hand, Wei Wuxian was complaining, "I didn't sleep the entire night, Lan Zhan." He crossed his arms over his chest and pouted. "You should have been more merciful to me, so this is my revenge."

Lan Wangji sighed. "My apologies, Wei Ying."

"No, no. It's too late." Wei Wuxian looked away, adding a little sniff to be dramatic. "Lan Zhan must find a way to make it up to me."

"Mm." Lan Wangji agreed, tucking Wei Wuxian to his side. He then leant down and pecked the back of Wei Wuxian's ear. Instantly, Wei Wuxian's face turned red, hand rushing up to cover the spot where Lan Wangji kissed him. He stuttered out, "T-That's… you can't… Lan Zhan!"

In a smaller voice, he mumbled, "You can't do that here when I can't kiss you back."

Lan Wangji shifted slightly and opened his eyes with a frown. Seeing Wei Wuxian half-naked, he tumbled off the bed.

The juniors winced, the few of them who were peeking through their fingers shutting it once more in sympathy to Hanguang-Jun.

Lan Xichen didn't know how many times he felt both pity and amusement for his brother after that drunken mess. It was incredibly rare to see Wangji get so flustered over something, but of course, only Wei Wuxian could ever bring it out of him.

'Does Wuxian even realize the power he holds over Wangji's heart?'

Wei Wuxian partially covered his chest with the blanket, leaving only his smooth shoulders out.

Lan Wangji started, "You…"

Wei Wuxian purred, "Hmm?"

"Last night, I…"

Wei Wuxian winked at Lan Wangji and smiled mysteriously, resting his chin on one hand, "You were so bold last night, Hanguang-Jun."

Ling Bao burst out laughing. "Oh heavens, Wei Wuxian. Hanguang-Jun is probably panicking out of his mind right now."

"Most likely," Tang Tang said, grinning. "Though knowing how he feels for Wei Wuxian, maybe he thinks it was pitiful that he couldn't remember their first time together."

"Aww," Li Li reacted, "He's probably afraid that he might have scared Wei Wuxian away with his erm… passion. "

"Impossible." Fei Fei snorted. "He should know Wei Wuxian wouldn't run away from something like that. If Wei Wuxian is still in his bed, it means it must have been good at least." She wriggled her eyebrows for emphasis and they all blushed.

Meanwhile, Nie Huaisang was sharing similar sentiments with them as he snickered behind his fan, finding Lan Wangji's shocked face hilarious. 'No wonder Wei-xiong loves to tease him so much.'

"…"

Wei Wuxian asked, "Do you really remember nothing of the things that happened last night?" He lifted the covers open and showed him the trousers and boots that he still had on, "Hanguang-Jun, it was only a joke. I just took off our clothes. You're chastity is still there, and you haven't been tainted. Don't worry."

Ling Bao coughed to replace his urge to cackle. "What a way to crush a man, Wei Wuxian."

Even Ouyang Zizhen was trying his best to resist commenting on what Lan Wangji must have felt hearing those words. Actually, a lot of cultivators who'd been given a reality check to the depths of Lan Wangji's feelings for the Yiling Patriarch were in several stages of denying it and trying to ignore it, because they didn't want to have the knowledge that the venerated and esteemed Hanguang-Jun had probably *wanted* to taint someone else's chastity that night.

Lan Wangji was still frozen on the spot and didn't answer. A shattering sound came from the center of the room. The two hurriedly played Rest three times for the body parts that had started getting agitated again. Wei Wuxian put away his flute and suddenly commented, "Our dear friend hadn't been missing his workouts."

When past-Wei Wuxian started appreciating Nie Mingjue's headless body, Nie Huaisang pursed his lips. 'Wei-xiong, I'll excuse your actions for now since you didn't know whose body parts you were looking at but… please stop smacking my brother's abs!'

Wei Wuxian winced, feeling Nie Huaisang's glare from where he sat.

Wei Wuxian said, "Hanguang-Jun, look at him. If he were alive and I hit him, the impact would've bounced back and hurt myself. Just how on earth did he train?"

The tips of Lan Wangji's brows seemed to twitch, but he said nothing.

"Aiya, because I was looking away, I didn't see that your expression changed while I was touching it." Wei Wuxian giggled. 'Ah, why is Lan Zhan so cute whenever he drinks vinegar?'

When Wei Wuxian smacked on it two more times, Lan Wangji finally took over the Qiankun Pouches, and silently started to seal the corpses.

"Wangji," Lan Xichen began, trying to delicately phrase his words, "Since you are now married to Wuxian, I hope you no longer have to feel… threatened over a corpse—"

"I am not threatened." Wangji smoothly cut in. When he didn't elaborate and seemed to also be rejecting having this conversation, Lan Xichen tiredly looked to Wei Wuxian.

Wei Wuxian grinned. "Don't worry, Zewu-Jun! Lan Zhan knows I'm wholeheartedly and completely his."

Lan Wangji smiled imperceptibly, "Mm," as Wei Wuxian patted a slender hand resting on his thigh.

Wei Wuxian saw that Lan Wangji still glanced at him after he put away the Qiankun Pouches, his eyes full of hesitance. Wei Wuxian purposely spoke, "Hanguang-Jun, why are you looking at me like this? Are you still worried? Trust me. I really didn't do anything to you last night. Of course, you didn't do anything to me either."

"Other than being very blatant with his feelings for you," Tang Tang said as a matter-of-factly.

Li Li replied, "Well, you can't blame Wei Wuxian for not realizing since Hanguang-Jun did act very resistant towards him in the past."

"I've always wondered how Hanguang-Jun evolved from that moody teenager to this smitten man right here." Fei Fei added, sounding intrigued.

After thinking for a moment, Lan Wangji lowered his voice, "Last night, other than taking your flute, I..."

"You? What else did you do? Nothing much, really. You just said a lot of things."

The Adam's apple on Lan Wangji's neck bobbed slightly, "... What sort of things?"

Wei Wuxian drawled, "Nothing too important. Pretty much, mnn, for example, you really like..."

Lan Wangji's gaze froze.

"You really like rabbits," Wei Wuxian finished.

"I'm surprised he didn't hit you." Jiang Cheng commented. Wei Wuxian's teases could sometimes come at the wrong timing.

Wei Wuxian mock gasped. "Lan Zhan would never hit me… that would intentionally hurt me." He squeezed Lan Wangji's hand meaningfully, and even if he wasn't looking at him, he could tell Lan Zhan's ears were red.

Jiang Cheng eyed him weirdly. "What's with that additional phrase? So has he hit you before?"

"Jiang Cheng," Wei Wuxian sighed, trying to stop himself from smirking. He failed. "You really don't wanna know."

"Senior Wei is being such a tease." Lan Jingyi clicked his tongue and scratched the back of his head.

"Good thing Hanguang-Jun is a man of excellent restraint, or else…" Ouyang Zizhen said, shivering at the thought.

"..."

Lan Wangji closed his eyes and turned his head to the side. Wei Wuxian added in consideration, "It's okay! Rabbits are so cute—who doesn't like rabbits? I also like them, as in, I like to eat them hahahahahaha! Here, Hanguang-Jun. You drank so much last night… Uh, not really. You were so drunk last night, so you're probably not feeling that good right now. You can wash your face, have some water, then rest for a while before we set off again. This time, it's pointing at the Southwest. I'll go buy some breakfast downstairs and not bother you any longer."

Lan Jingyi leaned in close to Lan Sizhui and whispered, “Maybe we shouldn’t let Senior Wei near the bunnies anymore.

“He’s just joking,” Lan Sizhui said, not taking it too seriously. 'Wei Wuxian adores Hanguang-Jun's bunnies, after all.'

However, Lan Jingyi had concerns, and he doubtfully raised his eyebrows. “Is he? Is he really?”

Lan Wangji stayed in the room to rest for a bit, while Wei Wuxian bought breakfast with Lan Wangji’s money. As he waited, Wei Wuxian sauntered downstairs, left the inn, and strolled around the area, buying some snacks along the way. He sat down on a set of stairs and saw a group of thirteen-, fourteen-year-old children ran across the street.

The child in the front ran, holding a long string in his hand. At the end of the string, a kite danced up and down in the air. The children behind him had toy bows and arrows, shouting as they chased and shot at the kite.

Wei Wuxian’s lips shaped into a nostalgic smile.

Jiang Cheng didn’t have to guess what Wei Wuxian was probably reminiscing about.

Suddenly, a gust of wind blew over, and the kite was immediately knocked off. One child cried out, “Oh no, the sun fell!”

Most everyone in the cave understood at once that these children were probably playing a game in imitation of the Sunshot Campaign.

“Hey, didn’t we play something like this before?” One of the juniors asked, and his fellow disciple from the same sect nodded.

The children stopped the chase and, gathering together in contemplation, started to discuss, “What do we do? We didn’t even shoot the sun, and it fell off by itself. Now who’s the leader?”

Someone raised a hand, “Me, of course! I’m Jin Guangyao. I killed the Wen Sect’s big villain!”

The same junior cringed, remembering all the times him and his friends fought to play as Lianfang-Zun before. “Yeah, maybe we should stop playing this game.”

The disciple nodded with a similar expression. “Agreed.”

Wei Wuxian watched them with keen interest. Someone else protested, “But I’m Nie Mingjue! I’ve won the most battles and captured the most people. I should be the leader!”

Lan Xichen chuckled, “Dage wasn’t really interested in politics though, but he would have made a just leader.”

“But I’m the Chief Cultivator!”

“Nie Mingjue” swung his fist, “So what if you’re the Chief Cultivator. You’re still my youngest brother. You’ll have to run away whenever you see me anyways.”

“Jin Guangyao” flinched and quickly ran away. Someone else spoke up, “You short-lived idiot.”

"Nie Mingjue” raged, “Jin Zixuan, you died even earlier than I did, so you’re more short-lived!”

Jin Ling frowned. He’d never heard of this game before but now his interest in it just lessened.

“Jin Zixuan” responded defensively, “What’s wrong with being short-lived? I’m ranked third.”

“Even if you’re third, it’s only your face!”

Jiang Cheng sneered at these children. Where the hell were their parents, and why were they teaching them old crap like this?

One of the children seemed to be tired from all the running and standing. He also moved to the stairs and sat down beside Wei Wuxian. Waving his hands, he mediated between the two, “Okay, okay. Let’s stop fighting. I’m the Yiling Patriarch, so I’m the most powerful. So, if you guys insist so much, I can be the leader.”

Wei Wuxian, “…”

“Aww, how cute. The kid even has a wooden stick on his waist.” A female cultivator pointed out. She couldn’t help but find it adorable how this kid was acting like a mini Yiling Patriarch when the real one was just sitting right beside him. Although she’d initially held fear for the Yiling Patriarch, she now couldn’t find the same feeling in her after getting to see Wei Wuxian in all his very human and real interactions. Maybe it’d been easier to let go of these feelings because she hadn’t been there when the massacre in the Nightless City happened, but until then, she decided to hold off judgement and just watch as the events of Wei Wuxian’s life unfolded in front of her.

Someone else barged in, “No. I’m the Sandu Shengshou. I’m the most powerful.”

Jiang Cheng nodded with a very solemn expression.

Yu Nianzhen discreetly rolled her eyes.

The “Yiling Patriarch” replied, “Jiang Cheng, how is it possible for you to be better than me? Is there even one time that you didn’t lose against me? How do you dare to say that you’re the most powerful? Aren’t you embarrassed?”

Scowling, Jiang Cheng really wanted to have a word with these kids’ parents.

“Jiang Cheng” said, “Hmph, I can’t be better than you? Do you remember how you died?”

The light smile on Wei Wuxian's face dissipated at once.

Lan Wangji tightened his hold around Wei Wuxian, his heart aching at the loss of his smile.

Wei Wuxian merely dropped his head on Lan Wangji's shoulder, soaking his warmth and comfort.

The "Yiling Patriarch" who sat beside him clapped his hands, "Look at me! Chenqing on my left, the Tiger Seal on my right, along with the Ghost General—I'm invincible! Hahahaha…" Holding a stick on his left hand and a rock on his right, he laughed for quite awhile, "Where's Wen Ning? Come out!"

A child from behind the crowd raised a hand and replied feebly, "I'm here… Uh… I'm just saying… When the Sunshot Campaign happened, I wasn't dead yet…"

"Ey, Wen Ning. Why do I feel like this kid got your likeness?" Wei Wuxian said to his friend.

Wen Ning murmured, "I guess… I did stammer a lot before."

Lan Sizhui smiled and patted at Wen Ning's arm beside him. "Uncle Ning can be meek and shy sometimes."

"Not when he's fighting perhaps." Lan Jingyi whispered to Jin Ling and Ouyang Zizhen who both nodded gravely.

Wei Wuxian suddenly asked the children why wasn't there anyone from the Gusu Lan Sect. But then the kid playing as Yiling Patriarch pointed to a kid who never said a word from the beginning to the end, "That's him."

The boy had a white rope wrapped around his smooth forehead. Wei Wuxian asked, "Who is he?"

The "Yiling Patriarch" pouted in disdain, "Lan Wangji."

'… Fine. These children understood the essence. Someone acting as Lan Wangji should indeed shut his mouth and stay silent!' Wei Wuxian's lips curled upward again. He murmured to himself, "How strange. Why can someone as boring as him always make me so happy?"

Tang Tang, Fei Fei, and Li Li all, "aww"-ed, while Ling Bao wondered if he should adopt a child once finding the right man to marry.

Meanwhile, Wei Wuxian was saying to Lan Wangji while scratching under his chin, "You are not boring, husband. You're very, very delightful to be around with."

When Lan Wangji came downstairs, he found Wei Wuxian sitting on the stairs, surrounded by a group of children. They were eating steamed meat buns together. "… Now, in front of you, there are thousands of the Wen Sect's cultivators. All of them were heavily armed and surrounded you so closely that even a single drop of water wouldn't have leaked in. Your eyes should be sharper. Yes, that's it. Okay, Lan Wangji, pay attention here. You aren't how you

usually would be. You're covered in blood! There's a lot of killing intent! You look really scary! Wei Wuxian, move closer to him. Do you know how to spin the flute? Let me see you spin it, with only one hand. Be cooler. Do you know how to look cool? Come, let me show you."

"Wei Wuxian" responded and gave the small stick to him. Wei Wuxian adeptly whirled "Chenqing" between his fingers, causing all of the children to crowd around him and gasp in awe.

Lan Sizhui's smile softened at the sight, feeling like he'd been one of those kids back then too. "Senior Wei is always good with kids."

"You'd think someone with the name Yiling Patriarch wouldn't, but Senior Wei has already shown he's not exactly the monster people make him out to be." Lan Jingyi said, nodding his head.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: the Yi City arc begins!!! Time for some fun with the juniors… //rubs hands hahaha

See you next week!

Dew V - Grasses I

Chapter Notes

thank you to all the warm greetings for my return!! <3

the errors in this chap are all mine since I was so sleepy halfway through editing this sdjlfskjf sorry!

*edited 9/14

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Master Wei is always kind.” Wen Ning said, joining in the juniors’ conversation.

They watched as Wei Wuxian said goodbye to the children and told Lan Wangji that he’d given them all of his breakfast. He even teased him about the little one wearing a rope around his forehead.

“Do you ever think they’re going to adopt a child?” Jin Ling asked in a curious tone.

“What do you mean?” Lan Jingyi said before jerking a thumb at Lan Sizhui beside him. “They already have Sizhui.”

“Jingyi!” Lan Sizhui hissed, blushing.

Jin Ling stared at Lan Sizhui in shock. “Wait, so the rumors are true? You’re really Hanguang-Jun’s son?”

Before Lan Sizhui could answer, Ouyang Zizhen interjected, “Did Senior Wei somehow birth a child for him and Hanguang-Jun before his death?”

Jin Ling’s jaw dropped. “Are you their love child?”

Lan Sizhui sputtered, face completely red. In the end, he buried his face in his hands, too embarrassed to explain.

Lan Jingyi looked at the two of them like they were uneducated cavemen. “Have you two never been taught where babies are made?”

Jin Ling rolled his eyes. “Of course *I* know, I’m just asking to be sure. We live in a world full of mysterious powers.” He shrugged. “Anything is possible.”

Lan Jingyi raised a brow. “So you’d be fine giving birth to a child.”

“I said anything is possible, not that it would happen to me!”

Lan Wangji asked "… What else did I really do, last night?"

Wei Wuxian quickly waved his hands, "No, no, no. You didn't do anything. I'm just being ridiculous, hahahahahaha… Okay. Ahem. Hanguang-Jun, I'm going to talk serious business now."

"I was just helping you save face, Lan Zhan. You never would have looked at me again if I had told you what you did." Wei Wuxian said, using a reasonable tone to explain himself.

However, Lan Wangji sounded almost indignant as he replied, "I will always look at Wei Ying," as if there was no force in this world that would make him stop doing so.

'Not exactly my point,' Wei Wuxian thought, but nonetheless, smiled indulgently at Lan Zhan.

Wei Wuxian explained how he thought the cause of the coffin-slamming noises, which had been silent for ten years, was because of the corpse being dug out last night. Cutting the corpse into pieces was probably a way to suppress the dead body which was why the murderer intentionally chose haunted places to bury the parts. Without the corpse to suppress the Chang Clan's resentful spirits, the coffin-slamming noises started up again. The person who did this probably knew about the technique from the Nie Sect's Saber Hall and was connected to both the Qinghe Nie Sect and the Gusu Lan Sect.

Nie Huaisang doubted his brother would have told Jin Guangyao such a controversial sect technique himself. That sneaky bastard must have snooped into their secret chambers without anyone noticing. It reminded Nie Huaisang why he had to strengthen the barriers in the Unclean Realm.

Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji decided to travel southwest where the ghost hand pointed at the province, Shudong.

"Here it comes." A junior said ominously.

"Yi City…" Another one sighed.

"Can we just skip all the parts about Xue Yang?" A young disciple begged, shuddering slightly.

"Hey, at least we'll see A-Qing again." A second after he said it, the junior winced, reminded of the incredible sacrifice the young girl made in order to save their lives.

"Is this the adventure you spoke of, Zizhen? About Hanguang-Jun defeating Xue Yang?" Sect Leader Ouyang asked his son.

"Yeah, but it wasn't just Hanguang-Jun, Dad." Ouyang Zizhen said patiently. "Senior Wei also helped out a lot."

Sect Leader Ouyang huffed. "We'll see."

The next scene showed a rather small village where the two ended up on a fork road. The arm pointed to a path that was full of weeds and stone.

Wei Wuxian said, "Why don't we ask the villagers?"

Lan Wangji nodded. Curiously, the screen did not follow Wei Wuxian and instead, stayed with Lan Wangji while he watched Wei Wuxian speak to one of the village women. After some time of Wei Wuxian chatting and smiling at her, Lan Wangji slowly looked to the ground and began kicking a small chunk of rock that was by his feet.

"Lan Zhan..."

Lan Wangji only had time to hear his name, before an armful of Wei Wuxian landed on his lap. Though thankfully, he was just splayed across his thighs to hug his chest but still...

"Why are you so cute!? Lan Zhan, I swear I never knew you'd be like this when I'm speaking to other people ahahahha!"

Lan Wangji's ear reddened, and he frowned slightly. He asked the man giggling against his chest, "Is it amusing?"

"Very! Very amusing," Wei Wuxian rubbed his face against Lan Wangji's robes, inhaling the ever present sandalwood scent on him. He raised his head and shot his husband a lovely smile. "Looks like I need to shower my husband with more love and attention, so that he never ever feels left out!"

Although Lan Wangji could deal with having just the bare minimum of Wei Wuxian's attention, he still conceded with a satisfied, little, "Mm." He wasn't entirely selfless after all.

Jiang Cheng wanted to throw a rock, a big one, at these two whipped idiots. Why couldn't Wei Wuxian just sit still instead of throwing himself at Lan Wangji every damn time he found him doing something "cute." Rolling his eyes, Jiang Cheng snorted derisively.

Wei Wuxian, of course, heard it. "Do you have something to say, Sect Leader Jiang?"

"No, I do not."

Lan Wangji stepped on it for a long time, rolling the innocent rock over again and again. When he looked up again, he saw Wei Wuxian take something from his sleeves and hand it to the woman who spoke the most. Lan Wangji stood still, a blank look on his face.

"Heavens, Wei Wuxian is taking his sweet time making Lan Wangji drink all that vinegar." Tang Tang said with a chuckle.

"He looks like he's about ten seconds to approach them actually." Li Li mentioned.

"Hanguang-Jun just wants his future husband to stay at his side." Fei Fei added.

Ling Bao pursed his lips to stop himself from shedding a tear. "Why are they so precious?"

Wei Wuxian finally sauntered over and stood beside Lan Wangji, "This path leads to Yi City. The first character on the sign is 'yi'. It's not yi as in chivalry, but yi as in a coffin home."

As they walked down the path, Wei Wuxian continued explaining, "The girls said that, ever since a long time ago, most of the people in this city died early, either having short lives or meeting accidental deaths, so there are many coffin homes for temporarily keeping corpses. Along with how their speciality is in making coffins, paper money, and other burial goods, they ended up getting this name."

"Fascinating." Liu Dazhong murmured. "I should make a trip over there to see what the city is like."

The other disciples in his surroundings turned to stare at him as if they thought he'd gone insane. It may just as well be because Liu Dazhong wasn't so sure himself.

Lan Wangji kept his eyes on wherever Wei Wuxian stepped, while Wei Wuxian talked as he walked. He mentioned how barely anyone left or went to Yi City which was why the path was so hard to walk on. Then Lan Wangji asked what Wei Wuxian gave the village woman.

Wei Wuxian replied, "Oh. You mean that? It's rouge. You have to show people your thanks when you're asking them things, right? I wanted to give them money, but they were too scared and didn't dare to take it. It seemed like they really liked the scent of the rouge. They had probably never used such a thing before, so I gave it to them."

"That's very sweet of him." Tang Tang smiled, nodding her head.

"Yeah, I would never part with my rouge." Ling Bao admitted with a chuckle. "They can get anything but the rouge."

"You know, I'm starting to think all those evil things about the Yiling Patriarch were just lies. Wei Wuxian is much too nice and dense to be so diabolic." Fei Fei commented.

"You're only figuring that out now?" Tang Tang said with a raise of her brows.

One of the men near them heard, and he couldn't help getting riled up. "What do you know about the Yiling Patriarchs misdeeds? He killed thousands of cultivators and innocents, that's enough to tell you what kind of man he is."

"Uh, no. But at least it's telling me what kind of *man* you are." Tang Tang fired back before she could stop herself.

"If Wei Wuxian was provoked first, I think maybe that's why he'd attack." Li Li softly said. "Wei Wuxian has been anything but harmful in these memories."

"Tsh," The cultivator clicked his tongue. "That's just what he wants you to think."

"You can't say that when there are people here who have witnessed the same things Wei Wuxian did and confirmed its accuracy." Fei Fei argued, getting mad.

With a pause, he added, "Hanguang-Jun, why are you looking at me like this? I know that the rouge's quality really isn't that great. But I'm not like how I used to be, when I always had a ton of flowers and jewelry on me to give the girls. I really don't have anything else to give them. At least it's better than nothing."

Lan Wangji's brows twitched, and he slowly turned his head away.

Wei Wuxian would like to scream at his past self to just shut up. Instead, he went and promised Lan Zhan that he'd give him all the flowers he wanted if he asked.

But Lan Wangji just said, "I don't need any material possessions from Wei Ying. I only want him."

Predictably, Wei Wuxian hid his red face onto Lan Wangji's chest, murmuring complaints only his husband could hear.

At the city gates, Wei Wuxian commented, "The feng shui is horrible."

Lan Wangji nodded. "Barren mountains and turbulent rivers."

"What an awful place to live in." A cultivator scrunched his nose while looking at the dilapidated state of the city wall.

"Yes, and it's clear that because of the city's terrain, the sinister energy would flourish a lot here. No wonder people died early and got into accidental deaths in this city." Liu Dazhong shook his head with a sigh.

"Just because the mountains enclose the area?"

"Mm, haven't you heard 'the greatness of a person brings glory to their birthplace'? Well, it's true for the opposite too. I just don't understand why anyone would build a city here." Liu Dazhong said, the curiosity killing him.

Squeak. They slowly opened the city doors and before their eyes was only an all-enveloping shade of white.

The cultivators began to squint at the screen.

"I can barely see anything."

"There's nobody there."

The two of them walked a few steps nearer to each other and entered the city together. The farther they went, the thicker the fog. Wei Wuxian thought, 'If someone took advantage of the fog and snuck between us, it'd be hard to say whether or not we'd notice.'

"Exactly." Wei Wuxian agreed with his past-self's thoughts. "Imagine if we had held hands, Lan Zhan, then I wouldn't have mistaken that person for you."

Lan Wangji nodded, never refusing the thought of touching Wei Wuxian.

Suddenly, his foot stepped on something. He looked down, but could only see white. Wei Wuxian grasped Lan Wangji's hand firmly so that he didn't go off on his own, bent down, and squinted. A head with a pair of glaring eyes ripped through the fog, jumping into his sight.

Shouts and muffled squeals rang throughout the cave.

"That was *shocking*."

"Why the fuck is there even a head just lying there?"

"Calm down," An older cultivator interjected, "Are you cultivators or not? Look, even the juniors are fine."

'We're only fine because we know what to expect,' the juniors collectively thought.

Wei Wuxian picked it up and squeezed it. It was a head made of paper.

"Oh it's just a paper mannequin." A female cultivator sighed in relief.

"Probably a Nether Brawler."

A clueless cultivator said, "A Nether what now?"

"A mannequin burned for a deceased to protect them from being bullied by other ghosts in the afterlife," answered a senior cultivator.

Suddenly, a thin shadow swept past him. It brushed against Wei Wuxian's shoulder, too fast for a human. Bichen unsheathed on its own and chased after the figure, but quickly returned to its sheath.

"That was the girl, right?" Jin Ling asked.

"Yeah, A-Qing." Ouyang Zizhen said with a sad sigh.

Lan Wangji said, "Pay attention. Be careful."

Wei Wuxian straightened up, "Did you hear that?"

"Footsteps and a bamboo pole."

Wei Wuxian's smile was a little bitter. "She tried. It's just that we were too stubborn to stay."

Lan Wangji nodded. "Mm."

Another series of footsteps came, greater in number.

"Here we come!" Jin Ling said, almost bouncing in excitement.

"A second round?" Wei Wuxian fished out a Gloom-burning Talisman and tossed it forward. The people immediately attacked. A multitude of differently-colored sword glares rushed over. Bichen unsheathed calmly and drifted in front of Wei Wuxian, fending off all of the glares.

Ling Bao murmured, “Look at him casually protecting Wei Wuxian. So handsome.”

“But Hanguang-Jun would do that for anyone, right?” Fei Fei said, a little teasing.

“Hush, don’t ruin it for me.” Ling Bao hissed, waving a flippant hand at her as he watched.

On the other side, the people fumbled in confusion. Hearing the shouts, Lan Wangji immediately sheathed Bichen. Wei Wuxian called out, “Jin Ling? Sizhui!”

“Hey, why wasn’t I called?” Lan Jingyi frowned with a pout.

“You did keep saying that Senior Wei was crazy. Did you forget all the punishments you accumulated?” Lan Sizhui reminded him gently.

“Oh.”

Jin Ling’s voice sounded through the white fog, “Why’s it you again?!”

Wei Wuxian said, “Well, actually, I want to know why it’s you again too!”

Lan Sizhui tried to contain himself, but his voice sounded delighted, “Young Master Mo, you are also here? Then is Hanguang-Jun here as well?”

Wei Wuxian pretended to cry. “Of course, only A-Yuan is happy to see me!”

Lan Sizhui smiled while inwardly thinking that he’d been happy to know Hanguang-Jun would be there, but he wasn’t about to burst his bubble.

Lan Jingyi also shouted, “He definitely is! The glare before was from Bichen, right? It was Bichen, right?!”

Wei Wuxian said, “Yep. He’s here, right beside me. You should come over.”

Aside from Jin Ling and some of the Lan Sect’s juniors, there were also seven or eight boys wearing clothes of different sects, who still acted hesitant.

“See, dad! I’m right there!” Ouyang Zizhan pointed out with a grin.

His father nodded with a sigh. “Yes, I can see that. You can stop acting so excited about it.”

Meanwhile, the other juniors were commenting about their appearances.

“Why was I wearing my hair like that? Now half the cultivation world will think I’m ugly.” One disciple whined, holding his forehead in despair. Another junior who was also there swatted him on the head.

“Nobody’s going to care, stupid. They’ll all be looking at Hanguang-Jun and Senior Wei.”

The disciple hissed, "You don't know that," and proceeded to sulk as he watched.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Corpse Poisoning! and WWX having many duckies following him lol

See you next week!

Update: I'll be posting the next chap on Tuesday (China time) 😊👌

Grasses II

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Wei Wuxian asked, "Why are all of you here? That was such a ruthless attack. Good thing I have Hanguang-Jun with me. What if you had hurt an ordinary person?"

Jin Ling retorted, "There isn't any ordinary people here—there isn't any people here at all!"

Lan Sizhui nodded, "It is daylight, but there is fog everywhere. And there is not a single shop open."

"No people, shady tapping sounds, and fog everywhere?" One cultivator drawled out while listing down with his fingers. "Yeah, I'd have kicked myself out of there *long* ago. It's clearly a trap."

"It's clearly a place that needs intense cleansing." Another, more concerned, cultivator said.

Wei Wuxian replied, "This won't matter for now. How did you guys run into each other? Don't tell me that you arranged to night-hunt together." Jin Ling saw everyone as an eyesore and wanted to fight with everyone. And, since he already had an unpleasant interaction with the Lan Sect's disciples, how would it be possible that they wanted to night-hunt together?

"Excuse me?" Jin Ling exclaimed like he'd been publicly ridiculed.

Wei Wuxian scratched his head, wondering how to delicately put this. It felt reminiscent of placating Jiang Cheng. "Let's not think about it, Jin Ling. You've grown up now." Still as grumpy as your uncle, but better!

Yu Nianzhen softly huffed. "He takes after you, Cheng Cheng."

Jiang Cheng, who'd been indignant for his nephew, turned to his cousin in shock. "What do you mean by that?!"

Yu Nianzhen raised an eyebrow. "You know what I mean."

"I wasn't as bad as him."

"...yeah, you were worse."

"What did you say?"

"Eyes on the screen, Cheng Cheng. You're missing out."

Lan Sizhui obediently explained, "That would be a long story. We were originally…"

Suddenly, the ear-piercing noise of a bamboo pole knocking on the ground came from within the dense fog. The juniors' faces changed at once, "It's here again!"

Wei Wuxian told them to huddle close and not attack. After a few seconds, one disciple spoke under his breath, "It's that again… Just how long is it going to follow us for?!"

Wei Wuxian asked, "It's been following you?"

Lan Sizhui said that the sound had been following them ever since they came into the city. Because the fog was too thick and it would be easy to wander off, they decided to walk closely together. When they heard the noise and vague shape of a shadow, they tried chasing it, but it disappeared while the sound continued to follow them.

A female cultivator asked, "Do you think it's a fierce corpse?"

"It would attack them by now if it were." Her companion replied, "Maybe it's one of Jin Guangyao's minions. It's suspicious how those children all got there together after all."

Wei Wuxian asked a series of questions then said, "We've been here for longer than you did. How is it possible that you ended up in front of us and only ran into us after you turned around?"

Jin Ling replied, "We never turned around. We've always been walking forward, following this path."

The cultivators began another round of curious questioning while watching.

"Is it another enchantment?"

"Maybe it's like the one in the Nie Ancestral Tomb?"

"A maze array, huh? Wouldn't be impossible, but why in such a place?"

Hearing all this, Wei Wuxian felt it a little funny. He had been there experiencing all of this firsthand, but now he was watching it as a spectator like these people.

Wei Wuxian thought of a cyclic maze array. He asked again, "Have you tried using your swords to fly up and see?"

Lan Sizhui answered, "Yes. I thought that I flew a long distance upward, but it was actually not that high. And there were also some fuzzy shadows darting here and there. I did not know what they were and was afraid that I could not deal with them, so I came down."

"Thinking about it now, they were probably corpse puppets too. It's a good thing you didn't try any higher, Sizhui." Wei Wuxian told him seriously.

Lan Sizhui nodded with a tiny smile.

Lan Jingyi was shocked, "The fog wouldn't be poisonous, would it?!"

Wei Wuxian said, "It probably isn't. We've been in here for quite a while, and we're still alive."

Jin Ling tsked, "I should've brought Fairy with me. It's all because of your damned donkey."

"If Fairy had been there, he might have known it was Xue Yang the moment he appeared." Wei Wuxian thought aloud, but then he shivered. "Still wouldn't want him there though."

Lan Wangji hummed a little in amusement and rubbed Wei Wuxian's arm comfortingly.

Lan Jingyi shouted, "We have not even blamed your dog yet! It opened its mouth to bite first, and then it ended up with Lil' Apple's hoove. Whose fault was that? Anyhow, neither of them can move at this point."

Wei Wuxian exclaimed, "What?! My Lil' Apple was bitten by a dog?!"

Wei Wuxian pouted pitifully. "My poor Lil' Apple. At least he's not as traumatized as I am."

Jin Ling said, "How can that donkey be more important than my spiritual dog? Fairy was given to me by my youngest uncle. If something happened to it, not even ten thousand donkeys could pay for it!"

Jin Ling pursed his lips. Even though he'd come to accept that his youngest uncle hadn't been a good man, he still loved the gift he'd given him which was his beloved Fairy. Fairy had been more than just his spiritual dog; he'd been his companion when he was alone night hunting.

Wei Wuxian retorted in all absurdity, "Don't use Lianfang-Zun's name to scare people off. Well, my Lil' Apple is a gift from Hanguang-Jun. How could you take Lil' Apple out to night-hunt? And even let it be injured?!"

"Eh?! He is? Did I miss that part?" A junior Gusu Lan disciple said, confused.

"No, he's just lying as always." Jin Ling harrumphed.

"When did I lie?" Wei Wuxian asked, pretending to be offended.

"Don't even try it. We all saw how you got Lil' Apple." Jin Ling reminded with a roll of his eyes.

Wei Wuxian snickered. "I could still say Hanguang-Jun gifted Lil' Apple to me since he let me keep him in the Cloud Recesses, right Lan Zhan?"

"Mm."

Jin Ling snapped, "That's not how gifts work!"

The juniors from the Lan Sect responded in unison, "Liar!"

Lan Sizhui clarified, "Uhh… Sorry, Young Master Mo. Your Lil' Apple… Your donkey has been making noise everyday in the Cloud Recesses, and the seniors have been complaining for a long time. They ordered us to get rid of it during this night-hunt, so, we…"

Jin Ling complained."I can't even stand looking at that donkey. And it's even called Lil' Apple. It's so damn stupid!"

Lan Jingyi thought that, if it really were from Hanguang-Jun, then they'd be in trouble. He immediately spoke up, "What's wrong with 'Lil' Apple'? It likes to eat Apples, so it's called Lil' Apple. How down-to-earth. This is ten times better than calling your fat dog 'Fairy'!"

Wei Wuxian clapped his hands. "The only one aside from A-Yuan using his brains here."

Lan Jingyi rubbed the back of his head, feeling pleased despite falling for his lie.

Jin Ling scowled petulantly.

Jin Ling retorted, "How is Fairy fat?! Try finding me a spiritual dog that's in a better shape than—"

Suddenly, all of the chatter ceased. Wei Wuxian asked, "Is anyone still there?" A series of oomph-s and mmn-s came from around him. Lan Wangji coldly stated, "Noisy."

' … How could he silence everyone at once?' Wei Wuxian touched his lips, feeling quite lucky.

"Of course he doesn't silence the one who makes the most noise." Jiang Cheng sneered, rolling his eyes.

Meanwhile, Tang Tang glanced at her friends slyly. "How nice of Hanguang-Jun to spare Wei Wuxian."

"We know why he did." Fei Fei shook her head, fond and disgusted in equal measure.

Ling Bao added with a chuckle, "I think he does like listening to Wei Wuxian talk."

"Well, Wei Wuxian has been silenced for thirteen years already, Bao Bao," Li Li said casually. "Hanguang-Jun probably wouldn't bear to be the one to silence Wei Wuxian, even literally."

All three of them stared at her.

"Wow, Li Li… you really went there."

"That's just painful."

All of a sudden, the sound of footsteps came from all sides. Wei Wuxian whistled lightly, and ended on a note that curved upward. The corpses briefly paused. However, a moment later, they rushed over!

“It didn’t work?” Sect Leader Ouyang said, almost incredulous.

“I told you, dad. We were dealing against Xue Yang.”

“And he had half the Stygian Tiger Seal at the time, am I right?” Sect Leader Yao interjected, stroking his beard. “What a truly powerful thing that can even hinder the Yiling Patriarch.”

Wei Wuxian was shocked. When the corpses neared, Bichen’s icy-blue sword glare tore open the fog. Surrounding the group, it drew a distinct circle in the air, cutting all of the walking corpses in half then returning back to its sheath. Wei Wuxian let out a breath of relief, while Lan Wangji lowered his voice, “Why?”

Wei Wuxian was also wondering, ‘There’s only one possibility… someone had already controlled them with the Stygian Tiger Seal!’

“Oh shit! So Xue Yang is here?” One shouted in surprise, his eyes bugging out comically.

“Yes? Have you not been paying attention?” The person beside him said, looking incredulous.

Lan Wangji lifted the silence spell, and Lan Sizhui could talk again, “Hanguang-Jun, the situation is quite dangerous, is it not? Should we leave the city at once?”

“But the fog is so thick. We cannot use the path or fly out either…”

One disciple exclaimed, “I think more corpses are coming!”

“Where? I did not hear any footsteps.”

“I think I heard strange breathing sounds…” Then the boy shut his mouth in embarrassment. Another boy responded, “You really are something, huh? Breathing sounds. Corpses are dead —how can there be any breathing sounds?”

‘That was probably Xue Yang or Su She,’ Wei Wuxian thought.

“Trust your instincts.” Wei Wuxian told the boys who were feeling shy over their conversation being heard. “It’ll save you next time.”

“Y-yes, Senior Wei!”

Another large figure crashed over. With Bichen unsheathing again, the shadow’s head separated from its body. At the same time, strange splashing sounds could be heard. The disciples who were near the scene all screamed in fright. Wei Wuxian immediately called out, “What happened?”

“This thing is really incredible, Lan Zhan,” Wei Wuxian remarked, gesturing to the screen. “I couldn’t see anything at all when we were there, but here, you can see almost everything. Look, I didn’t see the juniors getting poisoned like that.”

“It’s the work of multiple perspectives.”

Wei Wuxian hummed, lips quirking up slightly. “You get me as always, Lan Zhan. Yes, these aren’t just my memories. But we’ve established that when they showed that cave memory with the dancing goddess statue, and I wasn’t there.”

“An omniscient narrator.” Lan Xichen concluded, narrowing his eyes slightly.

Lan Jingyi said, “Something spurted out of the corpse’s body. I think it was some sort of powder. It tasted both bitter and sweet. And rotten!” He immediately spat a few times. Wei Wuxian instructed, “All of you, stand away from that area! Come here quickly. Let me see you.”

Lan Jingyi said, “Okay. But I cannot see you. Where are you?”

Wei Wuxian turned to the person beside him, “Hanguang-Jun, draw your sword for a moment, so that he can walk over.”

A clear, blue sword glare lit up an area around seven steps away. Wei Wuxian thought, ‘… Lan Wangji was there?’

A junior, who wasn’t there, gasped. “It’s not Hanguang-Jun!”

Suddenly, a shadow flashed before Wei Wuxian’s eyes. A dark face approached from in front of him. The mist-faced man reached out for the Qiankun Pouch hung by his side. However, after he had taken it, the Qiankun Pouch suddenly swelled up. The string that had tied it snapped in half, and three enraged spirits shot forward. They charged toward him!

Wei Wuxian laughed, “Did you want the Qiankun Pouch? Then, your eyesight must be in bad shape. Why did you take my Spirit-Trapping Pouch instead?”

“Ingenious!” Liu Dazhong reacted, clapping his hands.

Noticing this, Ling Bao and the girls clapped in delight too. Wei Wuxian was so smart!

With a clang, the opponent jumped backward and unsheathed his sword. Instantly, the spirits’ hatred-filled screeches sounded about. Wei Wuxian thought to himself, ‘so he really is someone with a high level of cultivation.’ He immediately shouted, “Hanguang-Jun, the gravedigger’s here!”

“That’s probably the only compliment Su She is getting out of me.” Wei Wuxian said, frowning in distaste.

Lan Wangji just watched with a blank face. Su She was no match for him.

Jiang Cheng’s face scrunched up. “I can’t believe you even gave him one.”

“Look, I didn’t know it was him, okay? I wish I could forget his name like before.” Wei Wuxian sighed.

Lan Wangji swiftly attacked the gravedigger. Having heard a few clashes of the blades, Wei Wuxian worriedly blurted out, “Lan Zhan? Are you hurt?!”

From afar, there came a muffled grunt.

Lan Wangji responded, "Of course not."

Wei Wuxian grinned, "So it seems!"

Tang Tang and friends went, "Awww."

Ling Bao had a sappy smile. "Cares so much about, Hanguang-Jun."

Wei Wuxian turned to Lan Wangji with an eager grin. "Did you see that, Lan Zhan? I was so worried for you."

"Mm. Wei Ying has nothing to worry about." Lan Wangji gently caressed Wei Wuxian's hair, eyes shining in a way that showed he was definitely happy.

The other person laughed bitterly. He attacked again. The clashing sounds of Bichen's glare and the other sword were farther and farther away. Wei Wuxian knew that Lan Wangji didn't want to accidentally hurt them and purposely drew the battle away to deal with the gravedigger on his own.

"Hanguang-Jun!" The juniors who'd been there all looked to Lan Wangji appreciatively.

Wei Wuxian turned around, "How are the ones who inhaled the powder?"

Lan Sizhui was supporting Lan Jingyi, "They are starting to have trouble standing up!"

"Come to the middle and number yourselves off." The remaining disciples gathered around and counted themselves off. Nobody was missing. Wei Wuxian inspected Lan Jingyi, "Show me your tongue. Ahh."

Lan Jingyi copied, "Ahh."

Wei Wuxian announced, "Yep. Congratulations. You're under corpse poisoning."

Jin Ling yelped, "How is this something to congratulate someone for?!"

Lan Qiren stopped himself from saying anything. Seeing that all of the juniors had survived from this, it looked at least that Wei Wuxian hadn't left them to die.

Though the other older cultivators had ugly expressions on their faces as they watched Wei Wuxian handle this.

Wei Wuxian lectured, "Well, it's another life experience. It'd be a conversation starter when you grow older."

Lan Sizhui worried, "Young Master Mo, will anything happen to them?"

Wei Wuxian explained how the poison will enter their bloodstreams, and once it enters the hearts, they will become corpses too. If they're lucky, they'd just rot away, but if not, they'd

end up like those long-haired zombies hopping for the rest of their lives.

All of the poisoned disciples gasped.

“I don’t understand how any of these juniors keep clamoring around Wei Wuxian when he’s like this. He’s making fun of them!” A strict woman said, irritated with Wei Wuxian’s calm demeanor over this. Those kids could have died if they’d been treated any later!

Wei Wuxian asked, “So you want to cure it?”Everyone nodded. Wei Wuxian continued, “If you want to cure it, then listen up. From now on, all of you have to behave and listen to whatever I say. Every one of you.”

They answered in unison, “Yes!”

Wei Wuxian pressed further, “You have to do whatever I tell you to. Be obedient. Understood?”

“Yes!”

Finally finding a reason to point out Wei Wuxian’s flaws, a sect leader complained, “Just a few simple words and you’re all coaxed by the devil. What has our younger generation turned into.”

“Truly incompetent and gullible.”

“And to think most of them are from the Gusu Lan sect.”

“Well… they can’t help but be encouraged when one of their respected seniors already treats the Yiling Patriarch amiably.” One cultivator said, subtly shading Lan Wangji.

Wei Wuxian clenched his hands into fists, but Lan Wangji quietly placed a hand over one of them. They weren’t worth the energy to get mad over.

A junior couldn't help but mutter, "Why are they always acting as if we can't make decisions for ourselves?"

"Yeah, it's like they think Senior Wei bewitched us or something."

"That's exactly what they think." Lan Jingyi whispered, jaw clenched.

"Just ignore it. We can't argue against our seniors and make them lose face here." Lan Sizhui said, the voice of reason as always

"Yeah, just wait for the other seniors to do it instead." Lan Jingyi smirked, and it brought smiles to the other juniors too.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: WWX showing off his congee cooking skills~

See you next week!

*Update: might update late monday night or tuesday (china time) too sleepy to finish tonight ;w;

Grasses II-Grasses III

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Wei Wuxian clapped and told the disciples to carry those who were poisoned, or else the blood would circulate quicker and the poison would reach their hearts sooner. The boys immediately stood as still as boards.

The juniors who'd been poisoned before couldn't help but chuckle. "We looked a bit stupid here."

"Speak for yourself." One of them scoffed. "I look great!"

Lan Sizhui asked, "Young Master Mo, all of them have been carried. Where will we go?"

Lan Sizhui was the nicest, most obedient, and least worrisome one, Wei Wuxian thought.

Lan Sizhui felt his face grow warm at the sudden praise. Lan Jingyi nudged him on the side with a teasing smile, while Ouyang Zizhen patted him on the shoulder.

Wei Wuxian just nodded along, no comment needed. A-Yuan truly was the best.

He told the juniors to knock on doors. Jin Ling questioned him if it was safer inside when it was already this dangerous outside, but Wei Wuxian convinced them that the inside couldn't be any worse. They had people who needed curing. From house to house, they knocked on the doors.

Jin Ling pounded for awhile, and didn't hear any response from within the house, "There doesn't seem to be anyone inside this one. Let's go in."

Wei Wuxian's voice drifted over, "Who told you to enter if there wasn't anyone inside? Continue knocking. We need to go into a house that does have someone inside of it."

A haughty cultivator snorted. "How could there be anyone there? It's obviously a ghost town."

His companion added with a mean laugh. "This Yiling Patriarch isn't so bright, huh?"

Jin Ling asked incredulously, "You want to find one with someone inside?"

"Yes. Knock nicely. Your knocks were too strong. It's quite rude."

Jin Ling grumbled, arms crossed over his chest. He didn't like being lectured, but he understood.

Jin Ling was so irritated that he almost kicked the wooden door down. In the end, he only… stomped angrily on the ground.

“He is so like Jiang Cheng/Cheng Cheng.”

Wei Wuxian and Yu Nianzhen looked at each other in surprise.

Jiang Cheng colored all the way down to his neck, while Jin Ling closed and opened his mouth, unsure if that was a compliment or not.

On the other hand, Lan Sizhui remained calm. At the thirteenth shop, he repeated the phrase that had already been repeated a number of times, “Excuse me. Is anyone inside?” Suddenly, the door shifted.

“Eh?! Someone is really still living there?” The haughty cultivator said with a start.

“Do you think it could be a ghost? Or another one of Jin Guangyao’s people?”

“They obviously can’t be trusted!”

“Why does the Yiling Patriarch even insist on staying in a house with a stranger in a strange place?”

Hearing their conversation, the rogue cultivator said snidely to himself, “Heavens, how have these people survived this long?”

Lan Sizhui regained his composure, “Excuse us, but are you the manager of the shop?”

A moment passed, and an old, bizarre voice leaked from the slit, “Yes.”

Wei Wuxian walked over and patted Lan Sizhui’ shoulder to get him to step back. He spoke to the manager to be asked to let in, but the voice said her shop didn’t accept travellers. Wei Wuxian said he was willing to pay.

Jin Ling blurted out, “Where would you get the money to pay? Let’s make this clear—I won’t be lending you any.”

Jiang Cheng nodded his head in approval. That Wei Wuxian already had someone willing to spoil him to the heavens.

Wei Wuxian waggled a delicate pouch in front of his eyes, “Look what this is.”

Lan Jingyi was shocked. “Are- Are you out of your mind?! That is Hanguang-Jun’s money!”

Wei Wuxian stuck out his tongue. “Well his money is my money, right? I took it from him fair and square, blah blah blah~”

Lan Xichen peeked at his brother’s face and saw no changes whatsoever. Wangji actually seemed pleased with himself that Wei Wuxian was willing to be financially dependent on him. Lan Xichen shook his head in amusement and looked away.

Tang Tang had to throw her head back and laugh, “They’re not even married yet, but Wei Wuxian already sounds like they are.”

“He’s really just tempting fate.” Fei Fei commented, grinning.

Ling Bao nodded. “Hanguang-Jun is not only handsome and strong but rich too. Wei Wuxian really grabbed the gold without lifting a finger.”

“B-But didn’t it take him dying?” Li Li said hesitantly.

Ling Bao hummed in thought, then shook his head. “If the Sunshot Campaign and the first Burial Mound siege hadn’t happened, I’m sure Hanguang-Jun and Wei Wuxian would have been happily married *a lot* earlier.”

Li Li was skeptical but did not voice her thoughts. She felt like there was something more that pushed them together than just what happened in their early years in Cloud Recesses.

The door was opened a bit further, and a gray-haired, expressionless woman stood behind the door. She let them in which had Jin Ling astonished. He whispered, “She really is willing to let us in?”

Wei Wuxian also whispered, “Of course. One of my feet was within the slit, so she couldn’t close the door even if she wanted to. If she still didn’t let me in, I would’ve just kicked the door down.”

A female cultivator raised her brows. “Impressive.”

Her friend leaned in to ask, “What’s impressive?”

“That he thought of it jamming his foot between the door. Most cultivators would be too courteous to do that, but in situations that could mean life or death, sometimes you have to do what you gotta do. Besides…” She snuck a peek at the old lady and shivered, “that woman doesn’t seem right.”

Her friend nodded. “Hopefully she’s not really one of the bad guys.”

The disciples all whispered in silence. They could only pick up their peers and enter the door one by one. When everyone was inside, she immediately closed the door. The room was pitch-black again. Wei Wuxian asked for the lights, and the woman told him to light the one on the table.

Lan Sizhui, who was closest, found an oil lamp covered with a thick layer of dust. He fished out a fire talisman and lit it up. As the room brightened, they found countless people crammed inside in the shop, standing shoulder to shoulder and heel to heel.

The sudden appearance of the mannequins had a few cultivators yelping and gasping in surprise.

“What in the heavens—?!”

“Oh, Oh!” Liu Dazhong pointed to the screen, shouting in excitement. “This woman must be the one who created that Nether Brawler mannequin outside.”

“So is this a shop that sells such mannequins then?”

“More like she sells burial goods. Don’t you see the paper money and pagodas on the side?”

Ling Bao couldn't help but notice the commotion of the cultivators near their area. One man always seemed to be very enthusiastic about the cultivation world. “That cultivator knows a lot.”

“Yeah.” Li Li lightly said with a shrug.

Wei Wuxian complimented the old woman for her craft. The juniors who had unsheathed their swords like Jin Ling breathed a sigh of relief and kept their weapons hidden again. They curiously inspected the mannequins.

Wei Wuxian asked the old woman again, “Would it be possible for us to borrow your kitchen?”

Jiang Cheng grimaced. “You’re going to cook?”

Wei Wuxian raised a brow. “You know what should be made to remove the poison from them.”

“Yeah, it’s just…” Jiang Cheng almost shuddered. Good thing Jin Ling hadn’t been poisoned or else he would have sent a silent prayer for his nephew's stomach.

Meanwhile, Lan Jingyi was already sending mental condolences to his past self. Why, oh why had he been poisoned too…

The old woman almost glowered at the lamp, “The kitchen is in the back. Use it as you please.” After her words, she dodged into another room and slammed the door so loud that a few even shivered.

Jin Ling exclaimed, “There’s definitely something wrong with the hag! You…”

“Jin Ling, you can’t take everything at face-value. Since you think there's something wrong with her, take a look at your surroundings and figure out why that is.” Wei Wuxian instructed with a good-natured grin.

Jin Ling hunched his shoulders together, muttering. “Yeah, yeah, I know.” Finding out that old woman was still alive despite being a corpse already had been shocking to him.

Wei Wuxian responded, “Okay. Hush. I need a few of you unpoisoned ones to help me. Any volunteers?”

Lan Sizhui hurriedly said, “I can come.”

Wei Wuxian told the poisoned disciples to not move until he told them to. Lan Sizhui followed Wei Wuxian to the kitchen in the back. Jin Ling followed as well, but leapt outside again after he entered. He fanned the air as fast as he could, “What in the world is this?! What are you doing here instead of thinking up cures?!”

Wei Wuxian replied, "Hmm? Perfect timing. How did you know that I was going to call you over? Lend me a hand."

A cultivator from the Jin clan felt amused that Wei Wuxian was just ordering Jin Ling around when nobody in Lanling Jin sect would ever do anything to upset him. Maybe that was a benefit only someone as Jin Ling's uncle could do, even if Wei Wuxian was only an uncle by blood after resurrecting in Mo Xuanyu's body.

Jin Ling shouted, "I'm not here to help! Urgh! Did somebody kill someone but forget to bury them?!"

"Young Mistress Jin, are you coming or not? If you're coming, then come in and help; if you're not coming, then go back and tell someone else to come over."

Jin Ling raged, "Who are you calling Young Mistress Jin? Be careful what you say!"

Lan Jingyi snickered, and Jin Ling turned to glower at him.

He humphed, "Well I want to see what on earth you're trying to do." With this, he stormed inside.

Jiang Cheng had to shake his head. His nephew was stepping into his own death trap by willingly following Wei Wuxian into a kitchen. Although Wei Wuxian wasn't terrible as a cook, the many seasonings and spices he always added to his dishes made them taste more like a volcano erupting inside his mouth.

While Wei Wuxian asked Jin Ling to throw away the spoiled meat, Wei Wuxian and Lan Sizhui fetched two buckets of water from the well to clean the kitchen. Jin Ling demanded what they were doing since he thought they weren't making food.

Wei Wuxian said, "Who told you so? We are making food. You can sweep the dust. Get rid of all of the cobwebs up there."

Jin Ling somehow obeyed. The more he cleaned, the more he felt that something was off.

Lan Jingyi cackled, enjoying seeing the other struggle. "How's it feel like doing the chores for once, Young Mistress?"

"Alright, that's it." Jin Ling growled, snatching his sword, and he would have attacked Jingyi had several juniors not immediately grabbed ahold of him to stop.

Lan Sizhui exasperatedly shook his head.

The three worked quickly. Once the kitchen was clean enough, Wei Wuxian poured some glutinous rice out of the second chest, washed all of it, and put it into the pot.

"Congee?" Lan Qiren questioned, pursuing his lips together. Actually, that wasn't such a bad idea, and it made sense why Wei Wuxian looked for an occupied house.

But if that boy thought Lan Qiren was ever going to voice these thoughts out loud...

Jin Ling asked, "You're making congee?"

Wei Wuxian replied, "Uh-huh."

"Is he cooking for himself? He should be making the cure!" A low-level cultivator with a high grudge for the Yiling Patriarch shouted.

His senior martial brother slapped him on the back of his head. "You fool, the rice *is* the cure."

"Huh?"

The senior martial just shook his head in exasperation.

Jin Ling hurled the cleaning rag onto the ground. Wei Wuxian commented, "You see how you get mad after working for just a bit? Look at Sizhui. He worked the hardest and didn't even say anything yet. What's wrong with congee?"

Jin Ling exclaimed, "What's not wrong with congee? It's so watery and tasteless! Wait… I'm not mad because there's something wrong with congee!"

"It would have been better if it had been watery and tasteless." Lan Jingyi said hollowly, his eyes staring unseeingly in front of him.

Another disciple who was forced to eat it too bitterly complained, "Why had there been spices in that kitchen… why!?"

Wei Wuxian told Jin Ling it wasn't for him, and Jin Ling made some more fuss. Lan Sizhui asked if it was the cure, and Wei Wuxian explained how the glutinous rice helps in healing wounds from corpse poisoning. The juniors both realized that was why they needed a house with a person inside, but Jin Ling questioned how did the woman survive if the kitchen looked as if it hadn't been eaten in for a year.

"So she is a ghost! Or one of Xue Yuang's puppets!"

"I knew it'd be too dangerous to step inside that house."

One cultivator from the Nanhu Liu sect couldn't help but question them, "So you think staying outside in the fog where they can't see the corpses or any other enemies that could come at them is better?"

"Why are you speaking to my senior brother with that tone, ah? You think you're smarter and more experienced than him?"

The cultivator looked away and rolled his eyes, muttering, "Didn't even answer my question."

Wei Wuxian suggested that she was either not the shopkeeper or she didn't eat. Lan Sizhui said that the old woman clearly breathes.

Using a spatula, Wei Wuxian nonchalantly stirred the pot of congee, mixing in ingredients from various bottles and jars, "Right. You haven't finished explaining. Why did you come to Yi City together? It wasn't just by chance that you ran into each other and then us, was it?"

The junior disciples couldn't help but watch with aggrieved faces as Wei Wuxian kept pouring more and more of the red spices into the congee. It was as if Wei Wuxian was just instinctively choosing the red jars and dumping a generous amount in.

A cultivator, who could cook, couldn't help but react, "I don't recall the cure needing that many spices. Was the congee still edible?"

A junior weakly answered as if he'd just remembered how the congee tasted like, "I don't even know," while another answered, "Senior Wei said the spice would make us sweat and get better faster."

Wei Wuxian looked away, when a couple of others and Lan Wangji turned to look at him. "Well, I'm not wrong! And I gave it a taste check first, ah. It was great!" Wei Wuxian shamelessly praised himself.

Jiang Cheng, as always, retorted. "Whatever tastes great for you is like hell on earth for others."

Wei Wuxian waved a casual hand. "You're exaggerating."

"He's not." The juniors simultaneously deadpanned.

Wei Wuxian laughed nervously and turned to his husband for support. "You like my cooking, don't you, Lan Zhan?"

Those who knew of Wei Wuxian's cooking suddenly turned their gazes to Lan Wangji as if imploring him to be honest. However, Lan Wangji only ever had eyes for Wei Wuxian as he replied, "Mm. Wei Ying is the best."

Delighted, Wei Wuxian's face split into a grin as he hugged Lan Wangji, "No, Lan Zhan is the best!"

"Wei Ying is the—"

"You're both gross. End of story. Let's move on." Jiang Cheng snapped, ending the conversation swiftly and effectively. Now was not the time for more dog food, *gods*.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: spotting a pretty girl through the window~

See you next week!

Update: will post new chapter on thurs!

Grasses III (2)

Chapter Notes

> oof sorry for the delay! ;w; it got really hectic this week haha but now I finally got to update, yay!! to one of my readers who said it's their bday today, happy birthday! Hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The boys' expressions immediately grew serious. Jin Ling replied they were all chasing after something. He came from the Qinghe area while Sizhui arrived from Langya. They didn't know what it was because it never showed its face.

"Now that I think about it, we still don't know who the culprit is." One of the juniors said, scratching his head.

"It's Su She, isn't it?" Lan Jingyi said. "They knew what Hanguang-Jun and Senior Wei were looking for in that grave, and Jin Guangyao should be smart enough to figure out that Chifeng-Zun's corpse could point them to his other body parts. Yi City was a trap to get us killed by Xue Yang." He pounded his fist on his other hand. "They put us there to make it harder for our seniors to fight, but they underestimated how powerful they are together."

The juniors all made *ooh*-ing sounds, praising Jingyi for his deduction. Jin Ling scoffed and rolled his eyes. "*Some* of us figured that out too."

Lan Sizhui, on the other hand, felt like there was still something not quite right about it.

Wei Wuxian asked out of the blue, "Is that your final answer, Jingyi?" He was grinning a little slyly at the junior.

Lan Jingyi puffed out his chest. "Of course! If it's not Su She, then it must be someone who works for Jin Guangyao." A few of the juniors nodded around him.

Wei Wuxian just hummed with a secretive smile and didn't say more. They would find out eventually if these viewing memories reached that part. Although Wei Wuxian had only speculated the truth and never got confirmation for it, he still very much believed in his own deductions.

Meanwhile, Nie Huaisang yawned as he fanned himself gently.

Jin Ling watched as the screen suddenly change its setting from Yi City to a familiar inn with a boy in gold robes sneaking past disciples dressed in Yunmeng purple.

“Ugh,” Jin Ling hunched his shoulders and hid behind Jingyi. “Why is it showing this?!” He hissed, hoping his uncle wasn’t glaring at him when he remembered his deception.

He was.

After passing Zidian to one of Jiang Cheng’s trusted subordinates, Jin Ling ran away immediately. He was thinking that he had to escape before his uncle found out what he did and give him time for his uncle's anger to subside.

Jiang Cheng chuckled in a way that sounded like someone was going to get punished soon.

Jin Ling shrank even further in himself. Ouyang Zizhen patted him consolingly on the back.

When he took a short rest at a large inn, Fairy suddenly started barking at the door. Jin Ling ordered the dog to stop, yet he immediately heard someone knocking on the door. Jin Ling asked for who the person was. There came no reply, so he got back to his business. However, after an hour, the knocks sounded again.

“You didn’t even bother investigating? Are you going to wait the next time someone tries to kill you?” Jiang Cheng barked, irritated at his nephew’s lack of initiative.

Jin Ling mentally groaned. This was exactly what he wanted to avoid.

Jin Ling leaped out the window along with Fairy. He circled around and went upstairs from the first floor, intending to see who exactly was messing with him in the middle of the night. Despite his efforts, there was nobody there. In the morning, he discovered a dead cat nailed on top of his door.

The cultivators who had pet felines all grimaced and felt pained at the image, while others were either curious or just plain disgusted.

Tang Tang shuddered and rubbed her arms. “That’s just scary. I wouldn’t sleep in that inn again.”

Fei Fei nodded. “Why did it have to be dead cats? The poor things.”

The screen returned back to the three in Yi City. Jin Ling said, “It was the same after switching to a few different inns, so I went on the offensive. If I heard that a cat’s corpse happened to appear anywhere, I would go and see, since I just had to find out who was messing around.”

Wei Wuxian turned to Lan Sizhui, “You guys as well?”

Lan Sizhui nodded and recounted his own story. When they met in Yueyang, they asked a hunter in the village who showed them the path to Yi City. Wei Wuxian thought to himself, ‘A hunter?’

“This is all getting very exciting.” A cultivator whispered eagerly to his friend who nodded as he munched on some candies he found in his robes. Even though he wasn't hungry, he just liked to nibble on something sweet.

He offered one to his friend who took it without taking his eyes off the screen.

'Didn't the woman in the village say the men would take a while to return?' Wei Wuxian continued thinking. To lead a few confused juniors to a dangerous place for them to face the violent limb of a fierce corpse—wasn't this the exact same routine as the occurrence at Mo Village?

Lan Jingyi jolted at that. His brows furrowed together as he tried re-analyzing the events.

"But didn't we say that the person behind the occurrence at Mo Village is on our side?" Ouyang Zizhen question. "If it's the same person, why would they lead us to some place dangerous this time?"

"You think getting almost killed by a blood-thirsty hand isn't dangerous?" Lan Sizhui asked with a small smile.

Ouyang Zizhen immediately leaned back with hands shaking in front of him. "No, no! That's not what I meant, hahahaha."

Suddenly, Lan Sizhui, who had been squatting on the ground to fan the flame, raised his head, "Senior Mo, I think that the congee is ready?"

Wei Wuxian stopped stirring. He grabbed the bowl that Lan Sizhui had washed and tasted a spoonful of the congee, "It's ready. Take it out. Feed one bowl to each person who had been poisoned."

The juniors gaped at the way Wei Wuxian just casually tasted that spicy congee like it was nothing but water.

"Senior Wei, do your taste buds still exist?" One of the previous poisoned juniors had to ask.

Wei Wuxian laughed and nudged Lan Zhan beside him. "Hear that? They think I've burned my tongue off after eating so much spicy food over the years." He cackled and snorted loudly some more.

Jiang Cheng muttered under his breath. "If only…"

Lan Jingyi only had one mouthful before spitting it out, "What is this? Poison?!"

Wei Wuxian said, "How is this poison? It's the cure! Glutinous rice congee."

"First of all, I don't know why glutinous rice would be the cure, but I've never eaten such a spicy bowl of congee before!"

Tang Tang squinted at the screen, then said, "I'm kind of… curious."

Ling Bao raised an eyebrow. "Really? Judging from their reactions, I'm sure they weren't trying to incite curiosity but disgust."

"So?" Tang Tang shrugged. "I like spicy food."

“I don’t know…” Fei Fei muttered, scrunching her nose at all the red in that congee. “It looks *very* spicy to me.”

Meanwhile a junior stated in Wei Wuxian’s defense, “Oh stop whining and just be grateful that Senior Wei saved our lives. If it wasn’t for him, we’d all be dead now.”

But a fellow disciple snapped at him, “You didn’t even eat the congee!”

“Well, whose fault was it that they got corpse poisoning?”

“...”

“That’s what I thought.”

The rest of the boys who had tasted their servings nodded in unison, all of their eyes wet with tears. Wei Wuxian stroked his chin. Lan Sizhui picked up the bowl and tried a mouthful. Even as his face flushed red and his eyes teared up, he pursed his lips and refrained from spitting it out, thinking to himself, ‘The taste… is so scary that it almost brings about a sense of deja vu.’

Wen Ning made a little hum sound at the back of his throat.

Lan Sizhui turned to blink at him, “What’s wrong?”

Wen Ning told him in a low voice, “When A-Yuan was young, you tried one of Master Wei’s cooking before, and you did cry.”

Lan Sizhui’s eyes widened, feeling both shocked and… amused at the same time. No wonder he felt a sense of deja vu with Wei Wuxian’s cooking, just like he did with seeing Chengqing.

Nonetheless, with bitter faces, they ate up the congee. Within seconds, all of their faces reddened and their foreheads gleamed as they suffered from the agony. Wei Wuxian couldn’t help but comment, “It’s not that serious, is it? Hanguang-Jun is also from Gusu. He takes spice quite well, so why are you guys like this?”

At that moment, the quiet Lan Wangji suddenly shifted a little. Wei Wuxian, who was pressed against his arm, looked at him sheepishly then giggled. “Are you embarrassed, Lan Zhan?”

Lan Wangji didn’t answer, but he was looking elsewhere at the moment. Wei Wuxian only needed to look at his husband’s red ears to know.

Lan Sizhui answered with a hand covering his mouth, “No, Senior. Hanguang-Jun’s taste is very mild. He never eats spice…”

Wei Wuxian paused for a moment, “Really?”

Li Li gasped and commented, “Do you think Hanguang-Jun would eat spicy meals when he’s with Wei Wuxian? And that’s why Wei Wuxian thought Hanguang-Jun liked it too.”

Tang Tang held up a hand while she clutched at her chest, “No, stop, it’s too much.”

Fei Fei was already squealing into her hands, while Ling Bao couldn’t decide whether slamming his hands against a rock would be an ideal place to vent.

Wei Wuxian could remember that in his past life, he asked Lan Wangji to have dinner with him so that they could reminisce together. All of the dishes that Lan Wangji ordered were packed with Sichuan peppers. But now that he thought about it, he couldn’t remember whether or not Lan Wangji actually picked up his chopsticks.

Tang Tang and her friends were now in the process of trying to muffle their screams and lessen their flailing.

All of a sudden, he really, really wanted to see Lan Wangji’s face.

“Here.” Lan Wangji whispered, kissing the top of Wei Wuxian’s head. Wei Wuxian leaned his head back and grinned happily at his lover.

“… Senior, Senior Mo!”

“Hmm?” Wei Wuxian finally pulled himself together. Lan Sizhui whispered, “The old lady’s door… has opened.”

Wei Wuxian signalled for them to stay put and walked into the room alone.

“Ah, I don’t have a good feeling about this.” One woman cultivator said, peeking through the gaps of her fingers.

The old woman sat with her head hung low. A cloth lay on her knees, tightly stretched with an embroidery frame. Her two hands stiffly stuck to each other as they tried to guide a thread through a needle.

Wei Wuxian sat down by the table as well, “Manager, why not light the lamp if you’re threading a needle? Let me help.” He took over the needle and thread—the thread went through at once. Passing it back to the old woman, he walked out of the room.

The woman cultivator sighed in relief and dropped her hands. Ever since she started watching this, her belief of the evil Yiling Patriarch started to fade. She couldn’t forget the way Wei Wuxian had treated the kids as they played like famous cultivators. “Wei Wuxian is so kind.” She said with a smile.

Wei Wuxian told them there was no need to go in. She was a living corpse, and he explained it as “From head to toe, everything seems to say that they’re a corpse, but the person is actually living. That’s what a living corpse is.”

Jin Ling was shocked, “You’re saying that she’s still alive?!”

“Living corpses is a case that doesn’t happen often.” Liu Dazhong said, pursing his lips. “If at all, really until a certain device was made.” He briefly fleeted a glance to Wei Wuxian, then looked away. He stared intently at the screen to learn more about these creatures.

Wei Wuxian asked them a bunch of questions that led them to think about how she's incapable of threading a needle. "Dead people's muscles are too rigid to perform complex actions such as threading needles. The marks on her face aren't age spots, but livor mortis. And she doesn't need to eat, either. It's only that she can breathe which makes her alive."

Lan Sizhui stuttered, "B-but, the old lady is already quite elderly. A lot of old ladies have poor eyesight and cannot thread needles by themselves."

Wei Wuxian nodded. "Very good points."

Wei Wuxian replied, "So I helped her. Did you notice the other thing, though? From opening the door until now, she hasn't blinked even once." He helped them notice how the woman's eyes didn't follow him but her head did. This was because dead people couldn't carry out an action as subtle as moving their eyeballs. They could only turn their heads and necks instead.

Suddenly, the cave was filled with sounds of people scrambling for paper and brushes as the juniors and some cultivators began writing these down.

Lan Jingyi was baffled, "Should we be taking notes?"

"Evidently, everyone else is." Nie Huaisang said with a wide grin, amused. He understood the feeling well when he'd note down Wei Wuxian's lively discussions back in Cloud Recesses that were more appealing than Lan Qiren's classes.

Wei Wuxian said, "A good habit, but do you think you'd have time to flip through your notes when you're out night-hunting? Keep it in your minds."

The cultivators who'd been writing his words suddenly froze, feeling shy as they slowly kept away their papers and brush.

Jin Ling spoke through clenched teeth, "Walking corpses are already weird enough. Why do things like living corpses exist?!"

Wei Wuxian answered that there were some advantages to living corpses and that somebody had thought that they could amend for the disadvantages of corpses by making the perfect corpse puppets. This was how living corpses came into being.

People turned to look at Wen Ning, the only 'living corpse' here, and he turned stiff, not knowing what to do with so many eyes on him.

"Aiya, Wen Ning is different." Wei Wuxian flapped his hands to get them to stop staring. "Let my past-self continue speaking."

He carried on, "Ahem. Alright. Wei Wuxian started it. But, he successfully made Wen Ning, or the Ghost General. To be honest, I've always wanted to ask—who exactly came up with this title? It's so dumb. Anyways, there were some other people who wanted to imitate this but weren't good enough, so they used improper means. Targeting living people instead, they developed living corpses." He concluded, "A type of failed imitations."

“Yup, that’s how you sum up Xue Yang.” A junior casually said. “A failed imitation.” Hearing this, Lan Jingyi snorted, opening his mouth to say something, but then another person spoke up.

"So you're saying you never made any of these living corpses from living people, huh, Yiling Patriarch?" Sect Leader Yang questioned, trying to imply Wei Wuxian's army of the undead before.

Wei Wuxian didn't bother turning around to face him as he flat-out said. "No, and I don't have to explain it when this device might show it anyway, so I hope you keep your eyes peeled."

Sect Leader Yang fumed at Wei Wuxian's clear dismissal.

Hearing Wei Wuxian’s name, Jin Ling’s face froze over. He snorted, “Wei Ying himself used improper means.”

“Who taught you to call me Wei Ying?” Wei Wuxian teasingly asked his nephew, who was blushing a lot.

Jin Ling made grumbling noises that could not be discerned. Wei Wuxian figured it’d be Jiang Cheng but then he'd never really called him Wei Ying either.

Wei Wuxian nodded and emphasized again at the more immoral ones were those who used living corpses. When Lan Sizhui asked what to do, Wei Wuxian told him to let her be. She might be one of those confused corpses. Out of the blue, a series of crisp taps of a bamboo pole knocking on the ground suddenly sounded.

A few people jumped. A young cultivator pressed a hand to his heart, sighing, “Those tappings need to stop. I’m too sensitive for this.”

A friend teased him. “You’re gonna catch an early death from this.”

“Fuck you.”

The sound came from nearby a window, which was sealed shut by strips of black, wooden boards. All of the disciples in the central chamber turned pale. Wei Wuxian gestured for them to be quiet. All of them held their breaths as they watched Wei Wuxian walk to the window and look outside through a narrow slit between the boards. As soon as Wei Wuxian approached the slit, he could see a field of white. Suddenly, the whiteness rapidly shrunk backward. He saw a pair of white, hideous eyes, glowering at the slit between the boards.

The appearance of the ghost had screams ringing throughout the cave, most notably from the two previous men while a few women who reacted just released small shrieks and gasps.

“Seriously! A little warning next time.” The same cultivator whined, refusing to look at the screen now.

His friend was patting down the sweat from his neck with a handkerchief, a little speechless.

Yu Nianzhen indifferently stared at these men, then rolled her eyes hard.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: didn't get to reach much of A-Qing this time so there'll be more of her next update~

Update: gosh it's been hard for me to find time to just sit down and write this week, I'm so sorry, I know you've been waiting for updates T__T i said I'd do it by thursday but work just kept piling up, even during the weekends OTL I won't promise anything for now since my schedule is so wack, but I hope you'll bear with me through this short hiatus. 🙏🏼

Grasses IV (1)

Chapter Notes

> I've already given my reasons for the delay in last chapter's endnotes, so I'll just announce here that updates for this fic might become sporadic from now on. So sorry for this change but until I can get my schedule back in order, I can't promise weekly updates. However, I'll still try my best. Thank you so much to everyone who sent encouraging comments as the week went by, instead of pestering me for updates!
>
> unedited; all errors are mine

See the end of the chapter for more notes

With an 'ah 'of exclamation from Wei Wuxian, the boys' asked fearfully behind him, "What happened?!" Wei Wuxian told them to be quiet, and Jin Ling asked what he was seeing.

Wei Wuxian muttered to himself, "Hmmm… Yes… This is amazing. Truly amazing."

Jin Ling was not amused at seeing this prank again. He humphed, "So childish."

Lan Jingyi snorted. "Says the guy who played along." Lan Sizhui nodded in agreement.

Scowling, Jin Ling said, "That was just… it was just to give Wei Wuxian some face. He wanted to scare you guys so bad."

Lan Jingyi rolled his eyes while Ouyang Zizhen patiently commented, "Didn't you get scared too, Jin Ling?"

"No, I wasn't!"

The disciples began to look curious. Lan Sizhui asked, "… Senior Mo, what is truly amazing?"

Wei Wuxian said, "Wow! It's so pretty. Be quiet, you guys. Don't scare it away. I'm not done looking at it."

Jin Ling got impatient, "Move! I want to see."

Wei Wuxian snickered, telling Lan Wangji, "Look at this, Lan Zhan. While you were gone, I taught the juniors a very good lesson."

Lan Wangji hummed, lips slightly twitching as he could tell what Wei Ying was planning. Jiang Cheng, meanwhile, shook his head in exasperation at his easily fooled nephew.

Wei Wuxian asked if he was sure and Jin Ling confirmed, then he looked outside through the thin slit between the wooden boards. Jin Ling frowned when he saw nothing. He thought to himself, 'I didn't scare it away by talking, did I?'

Lan Jingyi couldn't help but tease, "You're not that scary, Jin Ling."

"One more from you, Lan Jingyi, and I will run you through my sword, spiritual power or not!"

"Oooh, I'm so frightened now."

Then a small, shrivelled figure suddenly flashed before the slit.

Lan Jingyi shrieked while Jin Ling nearly headbutted Ouyang Zizhan as he jerked back in surprise.

Lan Sizhui said calmly, "Pull yourself together, children. We've seen this before."

Growing red to the ears, Lan Jingyi and Jin Ling glanced at each other before righting themselves quietly in embarrassment.

Meanwhile, the other (easily scared) cultivators had prepared their hearts beforehand so they weren't too shocked.

Jin Ling tensed up. He stiffly turned to Wei Wuxian who was leaning on the window beside the door. With one corner of his mouth curving upward, he raised his eyebrows and gave Jin Ling a sly smile, "Doesn't it look pretty?"

Jin Ling glared back at him and grit his teeth, "… Yes…"

Jin Ling straightened up and casually replied, "It's so-so at best. Only barely worthy of a look!"

"See that, Jiang Cheng! He's got the makings of a mischief-maker." Wei Wuxian presented proudly. "He's already proven that he can lie well too."

Jiang Cheng's eye twitched.

Jin Ling inwardly wished someone (read: Hanguang-Jun) would shut Wei Wuxian up.

Then he moved aside, waiting for the next person to be fooled. Lan Sizhui couldn't hold himself from staying still and walked to the same spot. Just as his eyes approached the slit, he bursted out with an "ah!". He jumped backward with a face full of panic. He only found Wei Wuxian after dizzily spinning around a few times, then complained, "Senior Mo! There is a… a…"

Wei Wuxian responded in absolute awareness, "There's a that, right? No need to say it out loud, else it'd no longer be a pleasant surprise. Let everyone go see for himself."

All of them waved their hands in refusal, "No thanks. No thanks."

“I feel like we still ended up getting a fright anyway,” said one of the juniors who shouted the loudest when the ghost suddenly appeared.

“Yeah, but at least it wasn’t a direct eye contact or I wouldn’t have been able to sleep for days,” Another one of the juniors replied.

“You didn’t get nightmares from Xue Yang?” The first junior asked curiously.

“Oh *he* haunted my dreams for a month.”

The first junior sadly nodded in empathy.

Jin Ling spat, “The situation’s already like this and you’re still playing tricks. Just what in the world were you thinking?”

Yu Nianzhen softly snorted into her sleeve. That sounded too much like Cheng Cheng.

Wei Wuxian said, “You joined me as well, didn’t you? Don’t imitate your uncle’s tone. Sizhui, was it scary?”

Lan Sizhui obediently nodded, “Yes.”

“I don’t sound like that.” Jiang Cheng grumbled under his breath, even though that did seem like something he said to Jin Ling once, twice… maybe a few times.

Wei Wuxian lectured, “That’s good. This is an excellent opportunity for your cultivation. Why do ghosts scare people? It’s because when people are scared, their consciousness fades while their spirit surges, making it the easiest moment to suck out people’s yang energy. This is why ghosts are the most afraid of those who are fearless, who aren’t scared of them. There are no opportunities to seize, so there isn’t anything that ghosts can do to them. Thus, as disciples of cultivation, your number one goals are to become braver!”

The juniors seemed to straighten up a little at hearing this speech again.

Lan Jingyi muttered, “Braveness is determined at birth. What can you possibly do if you were born a coward?”

Wei Wuxian replied, “Were you born knowing how to fly on swords? People only know how to do it after practicing and practicing. Similarly, people can get used to things after being scared.”

A couple of cultivators who were close to these juniors by being under the same sect or knowing their parents felt impressed in their hearts that Wei Wuxian could inspire such wise words to them.

“Wei Wuxian may look like he’s playing around most of the time, but he’s got a brilliant head on his shoulders.” A female cultivator said. The man beside her nodded in agreement.

“Dire situations like these are the best times to teach your disciples such important lessons,” The man nodded sagely, the wrinkles in his eyes growing more evident when he smiles.

Sect Leader Yang frowned at hearing such blatant praise about the Yiling Patriarch, while Sect Leader Ouyang kept his expression stony, no inflections flitting through his face.

Wei Wuxian continued by using the analogy of an outhouse, but the boys immediately denied that it was impossible to get used to such a disgusting place to eat.

Wei Wuxian wagged his finger. "It's only an example. Okay, I admit that I haven't lived in an outhouse before. I don't know if you can actually eat in there. I have no evidence. However, you must try the one outside the door. You must not only look at it but, moreover, look carefully. Watch for the details. From the details, find any hidden weaknesses in the shortest time possible. You must take the situation calmly and search for chances to counter-attack. Alright, have I said enough for you to understand? Most people don't have the opportunity for my guidance. Make use of it. Nobody move any further away. A single-file line, please. Look one at a time."

"Why do I get the feeling this trip suddenly became a class?" One young cultivator who hadn't been there questioned.

"But you've never been through a class with the Yiling Patriarch as your teacher and under a mysterious, life and death circumstance have you?" A different junior, who experienced this special class, said. He looked even proud of it. The Gusu Lan sect had very little fear for the Yiling Patriarch, after all.

"... Do we really have to?"

Wei Wuxian replied, "Of course. I never joke around. I never fool people, either. Let's start with Jingyi. Both Jin Ling and Sizhui have looked already."

Lan Jingyi sweated. "What? I would not have to look, would I? Those under corpse poisoning cannot move. You said so yourself."

"Look who's acting scared now." Jin Ling smirked at Lan Jingyi as he crossed his arms.

"It's a natural reaction to ghosts!" Lan Jingyi tried to defend.

Wei Wuxian asked to see his tongue. After Lan Jingyi stuck out his tongue, Wei Wuxian declared him cured. Lan Jingyi couldn't believe it, but since that was so, he could only toughen up and walk toward the window. He looked once, then looked away. He looked once more, then looked away again.

Jin Ling's snickering made Lan Jingyi wish he took back all the times he teased the Young Mistress Jin. This wasn't his most shining moment, but it wasn't a shameful thing to be frightened!

Lan Xichen pondered out loud to his brother. "I guess we do have to increase more practical lessons for the juniors once we return."

Lan Wangji nodded. He wondered if that meant Lan Xichen would stay out of seclusion a bit longer than planned. He didn't outwardly show it, but a small part of himself hoped.

Wei Wuxian knocked on the board, "What are you scared of? I'm standing here. It won't break through the board, much less eat your eyeballs or anything."

Lan Jingyi jumped away, "I'm finished looking!"

Wei Wuxian grinned and poked his husband. "Make sure Jingyi gets those extra practical lessons."

"Mm. His punishments could be included in them."

"That's a great idea, Lan Zhan!" Wei Wuxian clapped.

'No, it's not!' Lan Jingyi thought, mentally groaning at all the tasks he was bound to do when they got back.

And then, whenever someone's turn came, there'd be sharp gasps of fright. After everyone went, Wei Wuxian spoke again, "Finished looking? Then, everyone, tell the group what details you've picked up. Let's summarize."

Jin Ling fought to speak first, "White eyes. Female. Short and skinny. Fine looks. Holding a bamboo pole."

Jiang Cheng tsked. "You could have given more details than that, A-Ling. Next time, infer on your observations to arrive at a more accurate judgement."

Jin Ling pursed his lips into a slight pout, but he nodded obediently at his uncle's advice.

Lan Sizhui thought for a moment, "The girl's height reaches my chest. She is only wearing rags and does not look too clean, dressed like a beggar roaming the streets. The bamboo pole appears to be a white cane. It is possible that her white eyes were not formed after death, but instead because she had been blind before she passed away."

Lan Wangji nodded in approval. Wei Wuxian softly smiled when he saw it from the corner of his eye.

Wei Wuxian commented, "Jin Ling had greater quantity, while Sizhui had higher quality."

Jin Ling's lips twitched in dissatisfaction.

"Don't worry, Jin Ling! We'll have more night hunts together to get better!" Ouyang Zizhen excitedly said, clasping Jin Ling's back.

Jin Ling shrugged him off. "Who says I'll night hunt with you?"

Ouyang Zizhen blinked owlishly at him. "You did? Don't you remember the invitation you sent before all this happened?"

Flushing as he recalled, Jin Ling quietly muttered, "Oh… right."

One boy spoke up, "The girl is only around fifteen or sixteen. She has an oval face, with a lively air about her delicate features. She fastened her long hair with a wooden hairpin, which had a small fox head carved onto the end. She's not only small—her figure is slender as well. Although she's not that tidy, she's not grimy either. After some grooming, she's bound to be a lovely girl."

All juniors turned to a red-faced Ouyang Zizhen, who covered his face with his hands now.

Sect Leader Ouyang just shook his head like he wasn't even surprised.

Hearing this, Wei Wuxian immediately felt that this boy would have a very promising future. He vigorously praised, "Well done, well done. The observations are both detailed and unique. Child, you'll definitely be the romantic type after you grow up."

The boy blushed and turned to face the wall, ignoring his peers' laughter.

"Aww, he's adorable." Ling Bao cooed.

"He's also too young for you." Fei Fei commented with a teasing grin.

Ling Bao rolled his eyes. "I meant that very innocently, thank you. But it would be nice if my future husband had a way with his words."

"Like a poet?" Tang Tang asked curiously.

Ling Bao shrugged. "Something like that?"

Another boy spoke, "It looks like the sounds of a bamboo pole knocking on the ground were from when she was walking. If she had been blind before she passed away, she would not have been able to see even after she became a ghost, so she could only rely on the white cane."

Another one of the boys argued, "But how would that be possible? You have all seen blind people, have you not? Because they cannot use their eyes, they move and walk slowly, in case they bump into anything. However, the ghost outside the door has swift movements. I have never seen such a nimble blind person before."

"*Now* they're getting it," said a female cultivator in green robes. She snapped her fingers. "Come on, kids. I want to know who this girl is already."

"You sound like one of those impatient audience members when watching a play." Another woman said in amusement.

Liu Dazhong cut in, "I think they still have missed out on a few things. Why does this ghost catch their attention with her cane instead of speaking? Furthermore, if she's harmless, why is she frantically trying to scare them with her pole, unless… she's alerting them from something?"

"Ooooh!"

Wei Wuxian smiled, "Good job. Props to you for thinking about this. This is exactly how you should analyze. Don't dismiss any points of suspicion. Now, let's invite her inside to get some answers."

As soon as he finished his sentence, he immediately took off one of the boards. Not only the boys inside, even the ghost outside the window jumped from his sudden movement, warily raising her bamboo pole.

"Oh heavens, when he did this, I thought my soul would jump out of my chest." The same easily scared junior commented with a hand pressed to his heart.

Wei Wuxian first greeted the ghost, then asked, "Maiden, do you have any business here, having followed them all this way?"

The girl widened her eyes. Wei Wuxian comforted them, "What are you scared of? You're gonna get used to seeing people bleeding from the seven orifices in the future. It's only two of the seven that are currently bleeding, and you can't handle it? This is why I tell you to experience more things and toughen up."

Lan Xichen chuckled. "Wuxian truly is a great teacher to the juniors."

Wei Wuxian grinned a little bashfully.

She gestured, as if she wanted to express something. Jin Ling wondered, "Strange. Can't she talk?" Hearing this, the girl ghost paused, then opened her mouth. Blood gushed out of her empty mouth where no tongue lay.

Mostly everyone, even experienced cultivators, shuddered and gasped at the display. It wasn't a very pleasing sight to be subjected to. The juniors learned not to look a second time.

Wei Wuxian, seeing it again after knowing how she became like that, sighed. "Poor A-Qing. I wonder how she is now with Song Lan."

The disciples were covered in goosebumps. Wei Wuxian asked, "Is she using sign language? Does anyone understand?"

Nobody understood. The girl was so anxious that she stomped her feet, using her pole to write and scribble on the ground. With only a mess of stick-figures, no-one could understand what she was trying to say.

Liu Dazhong couldn't help but frown sympathetically at her plight. "It's too bad she couldn't express the danger to them. If Xue Yang had been the one to do these things to her, that's just a tragic way to go."

"I'd bet all my sect treasures it's Xue Yang." One cultivator from the Nanhu Liu sect said indignantly.

Suddenly, from the far end of the street came a series of sprinting footsteps and human pants.

The girl's spirit suddenly disappeared.

“Eh? Is it Hanguang-Jun?”

“Yeah, he hasn’t returned yet.”

“I would be more worried about him, if he weren’t sitting right here.”

“Maybe it’s one of Jin Guangyao or Xue Yang’s puppets.”

After listening to all of their discussions, Wei Wuxian couldn’t help but giggle to Lan Zhan. “Will nobody think Xue Yang himself would come out? The reveal is going to be hilarious if no one figures it out earlier.”

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: who is this mysterious person, I wonder?

BTW a reader has suggested if I could make a poll about whether or not to skip over the flashback scene narrating the story of our Yi City trio so that we could reach more WangXian scenes. I understand the desire to get back to more WangXian, but I also know that some of you enjoy the commentary of each scene, so I’ve made the poll here!

You may also try convincing me in the comment section here whether to skip or not, or to provide a solution that could satisfy both parties ^w^

Grasses IV (2)

Chapter Notes

> I apologize for updating after almost a month omg 🙏 my writer's block was big with this chapter and not to mention life 😅 I struggled a lot with the reactions here so I'm sorry if it's uninteresting ;w;

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The juniors wondered why she disappeared. "Could it be another walking corpse? Senior, we should shut the door first!" Wei Wuxian quickly put the board back and continued peeping outside from the slit. Everyone else peeked out as well. They saw a figure in black stagger out.

"Now who is *this* ?" A young cultivator commented, hand gesturing to the screen. "I thought this place was a ghost town."

"He looks suspicious," his friend said.

"He looks injured, how could you say that?" A female cultivator interjected. "He could be a lost rogue cultivator."

"Or he could be the guy trying to kill them."

The juniors whispered that it might be the mist-faced man, but Lan Sizhui suggested his moves weren't the same. Wei Wuxian praised the man for being able to slice through the corpses, but then poisonous powder rained down on him, and the juniors were dismayed.

Lan Sizhui urged in a hushed voice, "Senior Mo, this man, we…"

Lan Sizhui rubbed the back of his neck, feeling a bit embarrassed of his reaction now.

"I can't believe I ever felt sorry for him," Jin Ling muttered, watching the screen with a scowl.

"Yeah, it's so weird seeing this now." Lan Jingyi whispered, unwillingly impressed at the man's acting skills.

Ouyang Zizhen sighed, "I feel betrayed by my own emotions."

"He's starting to wobble!" a concerned junior said.

"Let him wobble, you naive fool," the same junior snapped back at his past-self.

Wei Wuxian spoke up, "We need to help him."

Lan Wangji's lips curled up slightly. Although he knew that man was Xue Yang in disguise, it didn't stop the warmth blooming in his chest at seeing Wei Ying's compassion.

Jin Ling asked how could they help if they couldn't go near the powder? After a moment of thinking, Wei Wuxian walked inside the central chamber and strode in front of two female mannequins.

Wei Wuxian said, "How about these two?"

"Ohh! Lan Zhan, watch! Watch me." Wei Wuxian yanked on Lan Zhan's sleeve excitedly, despite his husband already having his eyes on the screen.

In a way, these memories allowed Lan Wangji to see the moments of Wei Ying that he'd missed while he was off fighting Su She. He wouldn't miss a chance seeing his husband in action now.

Wei Wuxian lightly brushed his hand against a boy's unsheathed sword, producing a cut on his thumb. Turning around, he smeared two pairs of eyes, four pupils, onto the mannequins. With a faint smile, Wei Wuxian chanted, "Eyes behind thy long lashes, lips parted, smiling in tease. Mind not the good or evil, with smeared eyes I summon thee."

"He's using the Summoning of Painted Eyes!" A clan leader pointed out, his mustache trembling in indignation.

"He's showing that improper cultivation method in front of the younger generation." One of the women said with a pinched expression.

"Would you rather let that poor man die out there on his own?" An older female cultivator argued.

"Why can't he just use his flute and…" the woman did a flippant wave of her hand as she said, "make them stop?"

The rogue cultivator snorted. "So using any other Demonic Cultivation method is better?" He shook his head, his face one of exasperation.

Wei Wuxian commanded them to save the person outside. With shrill laughter from their mouths, the paper mannequins left the house and fought fiercely. It wasn't long before the fifteen or sixteen walking corpses had been chopped into broken chunks and they carried the weakened escapee inside. Then, they jumped outside again and guarded the doors.

The disciples inside the room were shocked speechless.

The cultivators as well, who'd never seen the Summoning of Painted Eyes in action before, were wide-eyed over the display. Who knew paper mannequins could be that strong? It felt like their three views were on the verge of collapse.

All the juniors showed excitement on their faces. Jin Ling was the only one who didn't look too well. Lan Sizhui went over to help Wei Wuxian with the stranger. Wei Wuxian spoke, "Nobody come near. Be careful not to touch the corpse-poisoning powder. It's possible that even physical contact would poison you."

The stranger coughed a few times, covering his mouth with his hand. A thick layer of white bandages wrapped around the man's eyes, as he spoke in a low tone, "Who are you?"

People who recognized Xiao Xingchen's features immediately grimaced. Jiang Cheng didn't know the exact details about the events in Yi City, only because Jin Ling would burst out into tears when he once tried reporting it to him. Jiang Cheng had been confused but slightly more curious to know now of the events that happened in Yi city.

"He looks handsome." A young woman cultivator blurted out before blushing.

Her friend chuckled and nudged her shoulder. "Stop always looking at people's appearances, meimei."

"What? I can't appreciate beauty when it's in front of me?" They both giggled behind their hands and turned back to the screen.

Meanwhile, the juniors had ugly looks on their faces. Lan Jingyi even clicked his tongue.

"What's wrong?" Ouyang Zizhen asked.

"Everything. Everything that happened in the Yi City is wrong. Xue Yang disguising as Xiao Xingchen and us having to rewatch this now and knowing that he's dead. It makes me sick seeing him manipulating us so easily like puppets." Lan Jingyi rubbed his tummy and Ouyang Zizhen gave him a sympathetic pat on the shoulder.

Lan Sizhui said, "The important thing is is that we all made it out alive, at least."

Wei Wuxian wondered to himself, Why have I been meeting so many blind people in the past few days? Both heard and seen; both alive and dead.

Suddenly, Jin Ling called out, "Hey. We still don't know who he is, whether he's friend or foe. Why should we save him without taking any considerations? If he's a bad guy, then wouldn't we be letting a snake in?"

Jin Ling scoffed. "See that, I knew to be suspicious right away."

"Oh please." Lan Jingyi rolled his eyes and said, "You're paranoid of everyone."

The stranger smiled, revealing the small tips of two canine teeth, "Young Master, you're very right. It would be best if I leave."

Wei Wuxian couldn't help but feel a small pang in his chest. Xue Yang had really observed Xiao Xingchen well enough to fool them spectacularly. However, he couldn't get it out of his mind the desperation in Xue Yang's eyes when he demanded Wei Wuxian to repair Xiao Xingchen's soul.

Jin Ling paused for a second, then hastily snorted. Lan Sizhui hurried to say, "But it is also possible that he is not a bad person. No matter what, not helping a dying person is against our sect's rules."

Lan Qiren nodded approvingly.

Jin Ling stubbornly continued, "Fine. You're the good guys. If someone dies, it's not my fault."

Lan Jingyi fumed, "You…"

The juniors glanced at the two people now, waiting for them to bicker as usual. But after seconds passed and there was no exchange between Lan Jingyi and Jin Ling, the juniors shot odd glances at each other.

Lan Sizhui smiled, small and pensieve. Jin Ling's prediction had come true in a way with Xue Yang shattering A-Qing's soul. She was a sore point that poured a bucket of cold water over their experience in the Yi City, especially after knowing what she went through and what she tried to do for them.

The black cloth wrapped around the man's sword had somewhat fallen off, and the body of it could be seen. Lan Jingyi widened his eyes. "That's--!"

Wei Wuxian covered Lan Jingyi's mouth with one hand and put the index finger of his other hand to his lips. Jin Ling mouthed two characters at him, then used his hand to write "Shuanghua" on the dust-covered table.

Wei Wuxian mouthed his question, Xiao Xingchen's sword—Shuanghua?

Gasps spread around the room as people regarded the new man with interest and caution. Although it'd been spread out that the menace Xue Yang had been killed by the mighty Hanguang-Jun, the details of the happenings in Yi City were only privy to few and not many believed in the so-called "rumors"either, mostly because older cultivators couldn't wrap their heads around the fact that the Yiling Patriarch had saved a bunch of young disciples with Hanguang-Jun.

Jin Ling and the rest nodded in confirmation.

One of the boys couldn't help but reach out toward the bandages wrapped around the person's eyes, but a pained expression appeared on the person's face. He inched backward slightly, and the boy immediately took his hand away, "Sorry, sorry… It wasn't on purpose."

That boy now shuddered as he thought about how he'd almost touched Xue Yang and could have been killed by him.

He managed with difficulty, "It's fine…" He felt around for Shuanghua. Wei Wuxian quickly pulled the black cloth that had fallen off back on. With Shuanghua in his hand, Xiao Xingchen nodded, "Thanks for the help. I'll take my leave."

Wei Wuxian tried to convince him to stay, but Xiao Xingchen said that he was long past hope.

Lan Jingyi bursted out, "Who said that you are long past hope? Stay here! He will cure you!"

Lan Jingyi scrunched up his nose, while Wei Wuxian laughed, finding it strangely hilarious now.

Wei Wuxian pointed to himself, "Me? Sorry, but were you talking about me?"

"Did you not cure us just now?

"But he's already breathed in too much of the corpse-poisoning powder…"

"Did you guys feed him the spicy congee?" One of the juniors, who wasn't there but who knew the story, asked.

Jin Ling smirked. "Of course! That bastard wasn't about to get away without at least getting an upset stomach."

"Ahh, our shining moment against Xue Yang." Lan Jingyi pretended to wipe a tear from his eyes.

Low chuckles arose from the group of young disciples while the cultivators near them grew curious over their hushed conversations all the time.

Xiao Xingchen said, "I have already killed a number of corpses in this city. They kept on following me and new ones would join shortly after old ones died. If I stay, you'll be drowned in an ocean of corpses sooner or later."

Wei Wuxian asked, "Do you know why Yi City became this way?"

Xiao Xingchen shook his head. He explained that he was roaming around this area and heard about the events in this city. He advised them to leave as soon as possible. Suddenly, they heard the mannequins laughing and the juniors peeked out the window to see that there were many corpses around the mannequins.

"They won't be able to hold off much longer!" Tang Tang gasped, one hand over her mouth.

"They're so ugly-looking." Fei Fei said while staring at the fierce corpses.

Ling Bao snorted. "Despicable man, that Xue Yang. Letting his corpses fight his battles. I hope he's ugly."

Fei Fei tilted her head, mouth pursed in thought. "Well…"

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Meeting another Ghost General?

Grasses V (1)

Chapter Notes

It took me 500 years but I finally got the chapter out T_T I made sure to make it extra long too ;w;

+ I just noticed it's been almost a year since I published this fic on dec 29 holy shit??? So I wanna take the time to thank everyone who's been here from the start or just discovered this fic along the way! Without all your motivating comments and support, I would never have reached this point of the story, so thank you for sticking with me ❤️ we might be here for another year or so, but I do hope I can finish this eventually!

Now on to the story!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Xiao Xingchen tried to leave again but stumbled to the ground. Wei Wuxian told him to just sit back and relax, as he drew more blood from his index finger. Lan Jingyi asked if he was going to use the Summoning spell again and offered his blood to be used too.

Immediately, a few other boys rolled up their sleeves. "I can spare some…"

"Are they out of their minds?!" The woman cultivator from before reacted, looking incredulous. "How could they give their own blood to a demonic cultivator?"

An older person shook his head in exasperation. "Completely irresponsible. And to the Yiling Patriarch of all people!"

"But nothing bad happened," A junior cultivator couldn't help but say. His friend backed him up.

"Yeah, and we trust Senior Wei!"

The woman turned to glare at them. "Nevertheless, offering your blood to a demonic cultivator is a grave mistake. Who knows what he plans to do with it? You're lucky to still be alive and in control of your bodies."

The juniors exchanged confused glances, while the rogue cultivator rolled his eyes. "The Yiling Patriarch is using every means to save their lives, and you think he's doing that to kill them another time?" He snorted, finding it bitterly amusing.

"We don't know how a demonic cultivator thinks," The woman hissed.

"His actions have been pretty plain to me, or are you too stupid to realize it?"

The woman looked dumbstruck, like she'd never heard anyone call her stupid before.

Wei Wuxian blinked curiously over at the rogue cultivator's conversation with the woman. "He's awfully supportive of me, huh?" He whispered to Lan Wangji with a smile.

Lan Wangji silently assessed the man and gave the smallest nod.

Wei Wuxian asked if he had talismans instead. After borrowing one from Lan Sizhui, he created a dozen more mannequins that began to move like the Nether Brawler. They charged outside to deal with the fierce corpses while Wei Wuxian helped Xiao Xingchen sit properly. Xiao Xingchen asked if that was the Summoning of Painted Eyes technique and Wei Wuxian replied, "I know a thing or two."

Xiao Xingchen smiled. "Yes… to eliminate these walking corpses, it was indeed the best method."

"Look at that, even Xiao Xingchen agrees to use demonic cultivation," A disciple from the Guijia Yang sect commented.

His fellow disciple sitting beside him nodded. "I don't think the Yiling Patriarch is doing anything wrong. If you ask me, that was a pretty cool move."

"Yeah!" The first disciple agreed. They both chuckled in secret.

"What are you two mumbling about?" Sect Leader Yang turned his head and questioned.

"Nothing!" They two instantly said, sweatdropping.

However, Xiao Xingchen told Wei Wuxian that demonic cultivation could backfire and that he might meet the same end as the Yiling Patriarch. Wei Wuxian couldn't help but sympathize with him.

Wei Wuxian sighed. It felt weird watching himself being so easily manipulated by Xue Yang. Luckily, there weren't many manipulative people like Xue Yang who existed, or else their whole world would be chaotic.

The juniors were narrating what was happening outside between the mannequins and the fierce corpses. Wei Wuxian picked up the last bowl of the leftover rice congee. "The poison has already worked its way around. The things in this bowl may slow it down, but may also not work at all, not to mention that it tastes really bad. Do you want to try? If you don't want to live, then nevermind what I said."

Xiao Xingchen took over the bowl with both hands. "Of course I do. If I can live, there's no reason not to."

"Did you really feed him that horrendous concoction?" Sect Leader Yao said, aghast as he watched Xiao Xingchen slowly lift the bowl to his lips.

Not even a bit sorry since he knew it wasn't the real Xiao Xingchen who drank it, Wei Wuxian turned to him with an exaggerated pout. "How would you know it's horrendous if

you never even tried it?"

"You just said it yourself that it tastes bad," Sect Leader Yao shouted, then he pointed to the juniors. "And they obviously disliked it too."

Faced with the decision to either side with Sect Leader Yao or the Yiling Patriarch, the juniors only had one answer.

"I don't know," Lan Jingyi started. "I think I actually miss it. What do you guys think?"

A junior from the Baling Ouyang sect was purposefully elbowed on the side. "O-Oh yeah, it was actually good after getting used to the… heat."

"The spiciness actually gives it that nice kick!"

"I agree!"

"You're right!"

After being piled up against the juniors' overwhelming praise, Sect Leader Yao felt as if he'd lost some face, and he huffily folded his sleeves, looking cross.

Meanwhile, Wei Wuxian was giving the juniors a considering look. "I didn't realize you guys missed it so much. After this is over, I'll make sure to cook up a feast for you all!"

'No, please don't, Senior Wei!' they all collectively thought.

Yet, after he had just one mouthful, the corners of his mouth started to twitch. He replied with respect, "Thank you."

Lan Jingyi clicked his tongue. "Seeing it again, I'm surprised he didn't just spit it out."

"Could have choked on it too," Jin Ling added.

Wei Wuxian turned around, "Did you see that? Did you see that? What did he say? You guys are the only ones who have such high standards, so full of complaints even after eating my congee."

Jin Ling said, "Your congee? What else did you do, apart from adding a bunch of weird things into the pot?"

Xiao Xingchen cut in, "But, now that I think about it, if I had to eat this every single day, I'd rather die."

"Should have known it wasn't him at that point," Wei Wuxian said, smacking his thigh with a fist. "I'm sure Xiao Xingchen wouldn't have rejected my food like that. Right. Lan Zhan?"

Lan Wangji honestly could not say.

Jin Ling laughed and even Lan Sizhui couldn't stop himself from bursting with a "pfft." Speechless, Wei Wuxian turned to look at them, and Lan Sizhui put on a straight face at once.

"He was only funny *once* ," Jin Ling begrudgingly said, growing red-faced under the stares he was getting.

Lan Sizhui came to his defense. "We couldn't help it. And stop looking at me like that, Jingyi. You would have laughed too if you'd been paying attention."

"But I wasn't." Lan Jinyi shrugged, still giving them a judging look.

Lan Jingyi announced that all the corpses outside had been killed. Xiao Xingchen put his bowl down right away. "Don't open the door just yet. Be careful. More might still come…"

Wei Wuxian said, "Don't put down the bowl. Pick it up and drink everything." With that, he approached the doors to peek outside. There were corpse pieces littering the ground, but no new corpses came.

"Is it just me or do those group of cultivators over there not like Xiao Xingchen?" A female cultivator whispered to her companion and pointed to where most of the juniors sat.

"Yeah, I've heard some strange things from them. It's like they want him dead or something?" She said, sounding a bit baffled.

Right then, a young disciple in dark blue robes said, "Imagine if he did drink everything…"

"Could you die from too much spice?" replied another junior, his eyes shining eerily.

"If only."

The two women stared at each other in shock.

Just then, Wei Wuxian heard a series of almost imperceptible noises coming from above. With his keen senses, Xiao Xingchen cautioned them, "From above!"

Wei Wuxian shouted, "Disperse!"

A large hole was suddenly smashed through the ceiling of the chamber and a black figure leaped down from the opening. The man wore black cultivation robes. With a tall stance and a straight back, he had a horsetail whisk strapped to his back and a long sword held in his hand. There were no pupils within his eyes, only white.

"He looks familiar…" Tang Tang muttered, tilting her head.

Fei Fei shook her head. "He's too dirty for me to tell."

"Oh! Oh! It's uh… it's uh… oh, Song Lan!" Li Li shouted, pointing at the screen. "Like from the picture shown before."

“Wait, how did he turn into a fierce corpse?!” Tang Tang asked, finding this hard to believe.

“That’s what we’re all wondering,” Ling Bao commented.

Song Lan aimed his attack at Jin Ling who was closest to him. Jin Ling defended with his sword and thanks to the immense spiritual power of Suihua, it didn’t break under the powerful force. Xiao Xingchen lunged to defend Jin Ling against the next attack, but collapsed soon after due to the corpse poisoning.

“Why the hell did he even do that?” Jin Ling said, feeling very uncomfortable seeing it. “He could have killed me there while I was distracted.”

“I don’t think Xue Yang had any intentions of killing us at the time,” Lan Sizhui said, thinking about it. “He needed to keep us alive so that he could bargain with Senior Wei later.”

“But then why attack us at all with Song Lan and then pretend to faint afterward, giving us time to figure out who killed him.”

Lan Jingyi shook his head. “Xue Yang and his games, Jin Ling. You can’t understand it. He probably just gets a kick out of seeing us finding the conclusions ourselves because he knows he’s got us trapped.”

Jin Ling made a frustrated sound. “Sick.”

Lan Jingyi panicked. “Just what exactly is he, dead or alive?! I have never seen a…”

Wei Wuxian pulled out his flute and played a shrill, piercing long tone.

It was so painful that even everyone in the cave had to cover their ears, though the effects weren’t as pronounced as the ones the juniors heard that day.

The corpse moved to attack Wei Wuxian. He thought, ‘He couldn’t be controlled. This corpse has a master!’

Wei Wuxian controlled his mannequins to attack and subdue the fierce corpse. In the midst of multitasking, Wei Wuxian ordered, “Nobody come here. Be good and stay in the corners!”

A senior martial disciple whispered to a friend who was completely against the Yiling Patriarch, “Isn’t he so cool? He’s always thinking of saving others, and I haven’t seen him killing anyone yet.”

His friend scowled. “*Yet*. It will happen eventually.”

Then Wei Wuxian continued to play his flute vehemently as the paper mannequins attacked Song Lan. Finally, a Nether Brawler shot down from above and landed on him, holding him on the ground with a foot on his shoulder. Three other Nether Brawlers held the corpse down.

Wei Wuxian walked over and commanded. “Turn him over.”

The four Nether Brawlers did as commanded. Wei Wuxian brushed the finger with a cut near each of their lips and they licked the blood like it was a delicacy.

A male cultivator shivered. “Creepy.”

“He’s feeding them his own blood,” another person stated with a slightly green face.

Lan Wangji was indifferent to it, while Lan Qiren’s brow twitched, unused to seeing such blatant practice of demonic cultivation.

Only then did Wei Wuxian look down again and continue his inspection. On the cultivator’s left chest, near his heart, there was a thin, narrow wound like he’d been stabbed through the heart. The corpse had been struggling and low growls came out of his throat. Wei Wuxian pinched his cheeks and forced him to open his mouth where there was no tongue.

“Blind eyes and a detached tongue,” Liu Dazhong softly spoke aloud. “Why do these two traits appear often? Are all of these Xue Yang’s doing?”

“Most likely?”

Thinking that he seemed like Wen Ning when he was being controlled, Wei Wuxian felt around the corpse’s temples and, as he expected, he found two metal points! Wei Wuxian decided that he shouldn’t rashly pull the nails out without interrogating him first. However, the corpse wouldn’t be able to talk.

Wei Wuxian asked the disciples from the Lan Sect, “Have any of you studied Inquiry?”

“Oh, that’s brilliant!” A Lan disciple said without thinking. He started blushing when it got him chuckles from others.

Lan Sizhui raised a hand. Wei Wuxian asked if he brought his guqin and Lan Sizhui said he did, taking a simplistic and bright guqin out. Wei Wuxian asked, “How is your qin language? Have you had actual experience? Will the spirit that you summon be able to lie?”

Lan Jingyi interjected, “Hanguang-Jun said that Sizhui’s qin language is fine.”

If Lan Wangji said that it was “fine,” then it must be fine. He wouldn't exaggerate or understate the matter, and so Wei Wuxian ceased to worry.

Lan Jingyi nodded. That sounded exactly like Hanguang-Jun.

Lan Wangji just very slightly smiled.

Lan Sizhui added, “Hanguang-Jun told me to focus on quality instead of quantity. The spirit that I summon will be able to avoid answering, but will not be able to lie. So, if it is willing to answer, then it will definitely speak the truth.”

Wei Wuxian told them to begin. The guqin was laid horizontally before the cultivator’s head. Lan Sizhui sat on the ground and nodded. Wei Wuxian began, “The first question: who is he?”

“I almost wondered why until I remembered none of them would know who Song Lan is,” The same senior martial disciple said.

“Oh heavens, are we that old…?” His junior martial brother asked, his hands over his face.

Lan Sizhui silently chanted the incantations and was finally ready to play the first sentence. A moment later, the strings of the guqin vibrated. Two notes rumbled out.

They figured out it was Song Lan and everyone turned their heads toward Xiao Xingchen, who lay unconscious on the ground. Lan Sizhui whispered, “Does he know that the one who came is Song Lan…?”

“He probably wasn’t even unconscious, huh?” Wei Wuxian tutted thrice. “I should have checked.”

Jin Ling also lowered his voice. “Probably not. He’s blind, while Song Lan is mute and even became a fierce corpse who lost his senses… it’s best if he doesn’t know.”

Hearing this statement, many of the juniors remembered the story Wei Wuxian told them after the events in the Yi City, and their eyes watered.

Poor Xiao Xingchen…

Wei Wuxian asked, “The second question: who killed him?”

In all earnesty, Lan Sizhui played it. This time the silence was three times longer than the one before. Then the strings of the guqin vibrated three times.

Lan Xichen closed his eyes, hearing the tones echoing with grief. What end must Song Lan have faced? Even as he heard the notes sound out the name, he felt the pangs of shock but also an undercurrent of disbelief that told him there was more to this story than meets the eye.

Meanwhile, the other Lan disciples who knew *Inquiry* as well were shocked. One couldn’t help but blurt out right away, “It’s Xiao Xingchen?!”

“What?”

“Huh?!”

“Did you hear that wrong?”

“No way!”

At the same time, Lan Sizhui on the screen blurted out, *“That’s impossible!”*

Wei Wuxian asked, “What did he say?”

Lan Sizhui replied, “He said… Xiao Xingchen.”

The disciples looked shocked. Jin Ling was skeptical. "You played it wrong, right?"

"How could he play it wrong? He's the kid who Hangua—" A Lan disciple was about to start lecturing the juniors when he noticed Lan Wangji turning his head towards him. His gaze was so intense that the Lan disciple decided to just keep quiet.

Lan Sizhui explained that when someone first started to learn Inquiry, 'who are you' and 'who killed you' are the first and second sentences they learn. "I checked them before playing. I definitely did not play them wrong."

Jin Ling continued to say that maybe he interpreted the qin language wrong. But Lan Sizhui shook his head. "The name and the three characters of 'Xiao Xingchen' are not at all common in the spirits' answers. If he answered a different name and I interpreted it wrong, it would not have just happened to be this name."

"Hmmm," Liu Dazhong rubbed his chin. "Could Xiao Xingchen have been tricked or manipulated somehow? He is blind."

"But I've heard that Xiao Xingchen is a very capable cultivator. Would he be tricked so easily?" Ling Bao replied.

Liu Dazhong turned to look at him in surprise, before making a thoughtful look. "You make a good point."

Ling Bao smiled.

Lan Jingyi murmured, "...Song Lan went to find the missing Xiao Xingchen, yet Xiao Xingchen killed him. Why would he kill a good friend? He does not seem like this sort of person."

Wei Wuxian said, "Let's not worry about this for now. Sizhui, ask the third question: who is controlling him?"

With a stern face, Lan Sizhui played the third sentence. All pairs of eyes stared at the strings of the guqin. Lan Sizhui interpreted the reply word by word. "The. One. Behind. You."

"It's Xiao Xingchen?!" Sect Leader Yao exclaimed. "Nonsense! How can it be—"

"Just keep watching," Ouyang Zizhen interrupted, having had enough of this screeching. Not even Sect Leader Ouyang could reprimand him as his eyes were staring raptly at the screen too.

Meanwhile, Wei Wuxian whined, "When will Hanguang-Jun appear again? I miss his pretty face." Wei Wuxian slumped against Lan Wangji, groaning against his shoulder.

Lan Wangji sighed, though fond. "Wei Ying."

"It's so unfair, Lan Zhan, we're being denied of your beauty, and instead, I have to sit here and look at faces that are…. not-you."

Lan Wangji gently lifted Wei Ying's face and made him look at him. "How about now?"

With a dip in his brow, Wei Wuxian seriously absorbed every angle and plane of Lan Wangji's features before a pretty smile broke out on his face. "All better. Lan Zhan always knows how to solve things."

"Mm."

Jiang Cheng mocked his, "Mm," then stuck his tongue out in disgust.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Xue Yang finally reveals himself

Forgot to mention this last chapter, but not skipping the flashbacks in the Yi City Arc got the most votes in the twitter poll! I read all your comments about narrating just the important ones, and I see you. We'll see which ones I pick when we get there~

*UPDATE: so sorry for the month wait but there will be an update before Jan ends 🙏

Grasses V (2)

Chapter Notes

never expected yi city arc to stump me the most with reactions?? orz also belated happy birthday to lan wangji!!! <3

unedited

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The cultivators watched in shock as Xiao Xingchen snapped his fingers and Song Lan immediately threw all the four Nether Brawlers holding him down.

“Wait what?!”

“How is he controlling Song Lan?”

“Is Xiao Xingchen a demonic cultivator?”

The people were at a loss as it seemed like their three world views were being toppled at the very moment.

Song Lan leaped up at once. Wielding his sword and whisk again, he slashed the paper mannequins into colorful pieces of confetti. His sword pressed against Wei Wuxian’s neck, while his whisk threateningly pointed to the disciples.

Lan Wangji immediately touched his sword, instinctively gripping it to fight against the person daring to harm Wei Ying. However since doing anything was futile, he could only narrow his eyes at the screen.

Wei Wuxian noticed his husband’s tenseness by the hand tightening on his waist and an amused smile emerged on his lips. For comfort, he leaned his head on Lan Wangji’s shoulder as they continued to watch.

Jin Ling put his hand onto his sword. Wei Wuxian immediately stopped him, “Don’t move. Don’t add to the trouble. In terms of swordsmanship, even everybody together wouldn’t be a worthy opponent to this… Song Lan.”

Xiao Xingchen said, “The adults are going to talk. Children can wait outside.”

Jin Ling’s brows furrowed. He remembered the frustration he felt for not being strong enough to save anyone at the time.

“I didn’t like that he called us children,” one of the juniors muttered. Another one beside him nodded aggressively.

Wei Wuxian encouraged them to leave, reminding them not to breathe the corpse-poisoning powder. He told Sizhui to guide them since he thought the junior was the most sensible. Lan Sizhui nodded. Wei Wuxian added, “Don’t be scared.”

“I am not.”

“Really?”

“Really.” Lan Sizhui smiled. “Senior, you are so much like Hanguang-Jun.”

Hearing this, Lan Qiren raised a brow.

Wei Wuxian was puzzled. “Us? How are we alike?”

However, Lan Sizhui only grinned in reply and led the rest of the group out. He thought silently, ‘I do not know, either, but they just feel similar. It is as though if either one of the two seniors are present, I will not need to be scared or worry about anything.’

“Hanguang-Jun and Wei Wuxian?” Jin Ling said, sounding very doubtful as he looked to Lan Sizhui.

Lan Sizhui shrugged with a chuckle. “They just do.”

Lan Jingyi tried to think about it and said aloud. “Well, Senior Wei and Hanguang-Jun *are* very reliable.”

“Hmm, Lan Zhan, what do you think?” Wei Ying raised his head from Lan Wangji’s shoulder.

Lan Wangji hummed, staying silent for a moment. Then he nodded. “Sizhui is right.”

“You agree?!” Wei Wuxian said, sounding amused and surprised. “Actually, you’re right. Sizhui is so smart and perceptive. He can tell somebody good right away.” He ended with a proud little nod.

Hearing this, Lan Sizhui ducked his head shyly. He could never get used to suddenly hearing his thoughts voiced out and people commenting about it.

Xiao Xingchen drank a cure for the corpse-poisoning powder. “Correct. A lot more effective than your scary bowl of congee, right? And it tastes sweet.”

“Tch,” Lan Jingyi clicked his tongue. “Of course, he had to mention it was sweet.”

“Evil,” a junior who had to taste Wei Wuxian’s congee muttered. “Pure evil.”

Wei Wuxian asked if his performance was all for their entertainment. Xiao Xingchen raised a finger and wagged it in front of his face. “Not for ‘your’ general entertainment, but ‘your’

singular entertainment. I've been looking forward to meeting you, the Yiling Patriarch, that is. It's better to see for oneself rather than listening to mere tales."

Wei Wuxian's expression remained unchanged. Xiao Xingchen continued, "I'm guessing that you haven't yet told anyone who you really are, have you? So, I didn't expose your secret either and told them to go outside for us to converse in privacy. How's that? Aren't I thoughtful?"

"This doesn't sound like Xiao Xingchen," a man from Qinghe Nie sect said anxiously.

A cultivator asked, "Did you know him?"

"No, but I've seen him when he visited our sect. He was so poised like an immortal but very grounded with his morals too, as if he were devoid of earthly desires."

The cultivator's eyes widened. "Woah… but didn't he kill his own friend? Maybe his kind attitude was just a facade? Or he changed after so many years?"

Frowning, the man hesitantly added. "...or he could be possessed."

Wei Wuxian found out that all the walking corpses in Yi City are under "Xiao Xingchen's" control and that he wanted Wei Wuxian to do a tiny favor for him.

Xiao Xingchen took out a Spirit-Trapping Pouch and put it onto the table, "Please."

Wei Wuxian put his hand over the pouch. "Whose soul is this? It's already in shambles. Even glue won't be able to stick it together. There's only one breath of life left."

Realizing what they were looking at, the juniors's expressions sagged a little.

Xiao Xingchen said, "If this person's soul was that easy to stick together, why would I need your help?"

"I still don't understand why he wanted Senior Wei to knit the soul back together of someone he killed?" Jin Ling pursed his lips together.

"Regret maybe?" Lan Sizhui answered.

Lan Jingyi scoffed, " We're talking about *Xue Yang* , remember?"

Wei Wuxian took his hand away and explained how fixing the soul was an impossible task. However, Xiao Xingchen replied, "I don't understand and I don't care. Even if you don't want to, you'll have to do me the favor. Senior, don't forget that your children are still staring at you from outside, waiting for you to help them out of the danger."

"Next time, don't rely too heavily on the Yiling Patriarch or you'll always end up like hostages." Sect Leader Ouyang said to his son.

"I know! I want to get stronger so that I can protect the people I love." Ouyang Zizhen replied with passion.

Wei Wuxian laughed, "I, too, would rather meet you in person instead of listening to the tales. Xue Yang, why are you pretending to be a cultivator instead of being the delinquent you truly are?"

The name *Xue Yang* erupted a mild ruckus inside the cave, stifled gasps and plenty of whispering.

"Xue Yang?!"

"This is Xue Yang?"

"He's disguised himself all along!"

"Tricky bastard."

"So where's Xiao Xingchen?"

The man from Qinghe Ni sect could finally sigh in relief. He was glad his impression of Xiao Xingchen hadn't been wrong.

With a pause, "Xiao Xingchen" raised his hand and took off the bandages around his eyes.

As soon as his face was revealed, Ling Bao cursed. Tang Tang looked to him curiously. "What's wrong?"

"Oh uh nothing. I felt like I just got slapped in the face."

Fei Fei snorted, knowing exactly why. "What a shame to be so evil but to look this pretty."

Xue Yang tossed the bandages to the side, "Uh-oh. You found out."

Wei Wuxian said, "Purposely pretending that the pain is unbearable so that our consciences won't allow us to take off your bandages and see; purposely showing us some of Shuanghua; purposely blurting out that you're a roaming cultivator by accident. You knew of not only how to make yourself appear injured and defenseless, but moreover how to gain the sympathy of others. You truly brought out a genuine, virtuous Xiao Xingchen. If not for how you were aware of more things than you should, I really would've believed that you were him."

"He tricked all of us," Lan Jingyi said, smacking his own thigh. "Even knowing who he is now, I couldn't see a single flaw in his acting."

"A dangerous foe," Lan Xichen muttered as he stared at Xue Yang.

"Ah!" Liu Dazhong realized something. "That's why Song Lan said "the one behind you" instead of Xiao Xingchen like in his previous answers because they weren't the same person. He wanted to reveal to them that the man was dangerous. Such an obvious clue!"

'Was it that obvious?' Ling Bao thought to himself.

Xue Yang told him it was easier to gain the trust of others that way and he had a friend who had excellent acting skills.

"Three guesses as to who that is," Ouyang Zizhen said with a roll of his eyes.

"Uh…" Lan Jingyi mumbled. "You're referring to Jin Guangyao right?"

"Of course, *him,* Jingyi. Who else was I referring to?"

Wei Wuxian said that Xue Yang was skilled enough to restore the soul since he made the long nails that were controlling Song Lan and Wen Ning and that he completed half of the seal. But Xue Yang was unconvinced and told Wei Wuxian he was better than him. "So if there's something I can't do, you must be able to do it."

"As much as I agree that I'm the better one between the two of us, he's placing way too much belief in me," Wei Wuxian commented. Then he snorted. "Imagine if we had ever joined hands."

A female cultivator shivered at the thought, going pale. "We'd all be dead by now."

"One Xue Yang is already bad enough." Sect Leader Yao mumbled.

Yu Nianzhen hummed. "So between Xue Yang and Wei Wuxian, who would you have wanted to die first?"

Sect Leader Yao stuttered, a little flustered by the sudden question. "X-Xue Yang, of course! Even though the Yiling Patriarch has done some horrendous things, he's the lesser of two evils."

Yu Nianzhen raised a brow, surprised he even said that.

Wei Wuxian touched his chin. "You're being too humble."

Xue Yang spoke about how he always kept his word and compared it to when he vowed to eliminate an entire clan without even leaving a pet behind.

Then a black-robed shadow swept inside. Wen Ning was thrown in and Wei Wuxian and Xue Yang stepped back in unison. Song Lan flipped as he was midair and landed on top of the table. After he steadied, he quickly turned to look at the door. Black streaks of blood climbed over his cheeks.

The juniors cheered for the arrival of their savior! Wen Ning couldn't help but blush in a corpse way.

Wei Wuxian ordered, "Fight outside. Be careful not to beat him up too badly. Watch the living people and don't let any other corpses approach them."

Wen Ning dragged Song Lan out and began his aggressive attack.

Xue Yang asked, "Guess who's gonna win?"

“Wen Ning!” All the juniors in the cave shouted. Wei Wuxian also joined in for fun, laughing as he saw Wen Ning covering his face shyly.

Wei Wuxian said Wen Ning while Xue Yang found it troublesome that the loyal ones wouldn’t easily obey. Wei Wuxian replied in an indifferent tone, “Wen Ning is not a thing.”

Xue Yang laughed, “Don’t you see that what you said could be interpreted in a different way?” As the “be” came out of his mouth, he suddenly unsheathed his sword and attacked.

Tang Tang almost jumped. “That surprised me. He’s so sudden!”

Li Li nodded. “Good thing Wei Wuxian has great reflexes!”

Wei Wuxian darted to the side. “Do you often sneak up on people when you’re in the middle of a sentence?”

Xue Yang’s voice was filled with surprise. “Of course. I’m a delinquent, aren’t I? I’m sure you know already. Anyways, it’s not that I want to kill you. I just want to make it so that you can’t move. Then I can take you back and you can take your time repairing the soul for me.”

“Was he planning on cutting Senior Wei’s limbs then?” Jin Ling said in horror.

Wei Wuxian shook his head, turning to the young disciples. “Don’t worry, as if I’d let him!” Or more like Hanguang-Jun wouldn’t ever let him. Wei Wuxian snickered at the thought.

Wei Wuxian refused to fix the soul again and Xue Yang continued to convince. Before he finished his sentence, he lunged once more. Wei Wuxian dodged and dodged again, surrounded by ragged strips of paper that covered the ground. He thought to himself, ‘the little delinquent has some good moves.’

“But not as good as Hanguang-Jun,” Wei Wuxian said smugly.

Lan Wangji replied, “Not as good as Wei Ying too.”

Wei Wuxian gasped in delight.

Wei Wuxian realized the man was taking advantage of his body’s low spiritual power and told Xue Yang he didn't want to deal with him any longer. Xue Yang grinned, “Who else? That Hanguang-Jun? I got more than three hundred walking corpses to gang up on him. He…”

Before he finished his sentence, a white-robed figure descended from the sky. Bichen’s icy blue glare swept at him.

“Hanguang-Jun saves the day again!” Wei Wuxian giddily cheered. “Finally it’s getting interesting to watch.”

“Were you that bored with just your face and voice already?” Jiang Cheng asked with a little smirk.

Wei Wuxian rolled his eyes. “I’m not that vain that I want to keep looking at myself. I want to stare at Lan Zhan more!”

“He’s just right beside you!?” Jiang Cheng could never understand this idiot and his stupid love.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: more HANGUANG-JUUUUUN!!!

Grasses VI

Chapter Notes

> Thank you so much for all the heartwarming comments recently!! ;w; They've been a great motivator for me to keep going and to not forget this fic haha
>
> Hope you all enjoy this update!
>
> (unedited; apologies for any mistakes)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lan Wangji stood in front of Wei Wuxian. Xue Yang fended off the attack by casting out Shuanghua and the two swords collided, then flew back to their respective owners. Wei Wuxian commented, "Isn't this called 'to come in time is better than to come early'?"

Lan Wangji said, "Yes."

Tang Tang was filled with joy. "Hanguang-Jun arrived just in time to protect his husband!"

"Hanguang-Jun wouldn't let anyone hurt Wei Wuxian, or else he'd chop them up." Fei Fei demonstrated with chopping motions of her hand.

Ling Bao snorted. It really was envious to get a husband who would always be there to protect you no matter what.

Hanguang-Jun turned back to fighting with Xue Yang. With a roll of his eyes and a grin on his face, Xue Yang tossed Shuanghua to his left hand. He pulled out another sword, and seamlessly adjusted to a double-sworded style of attack.

The new sword was grim and dark, and Xue Yang gained the upper hand at once.

"It's Jiangzai. Xue Yang's sword," Liu Dazhong said with a frown. That sword had witnessed countless bloodshed in its life. But for the other cultivators, they were more shocked about Xue Yang's unexpected sword skills.

"He can wield two swords?!"

"This Xue Yang is too powerful and dangerous *ah* ."

"You'd have to thank Hanguang-Jun for his death then."

Lan Wangji said to Wei Wuxian, "Step back. You are not needed here."

Wei Wuxian humbly listened and stepped back.

“You know, Lan Zhan,” Wei Wuxian started, smiling at Lan Wangji. Since he was already pressed to his side, Wei Wuxian started tracing circles around his husband’s wide chest. “That was kinda hot.”

Lan Wangji slanted a glance at him. His expression didn’t change at all, but his lips slightly twitched. Wei Wuxian bit his lip and suppressed a shudder.

When Wei Wuxian got to the door, he looked outside. Wen Ning and Song Lan were fighting expressionlessly, ceaselessly smashing and banging. Wei Wuxian muttered under his breath, “I don’t think I’m needed here, either.”

Suddenly, he saw that Lan Jingyi, inside a dimly-lit shop, was frantically waving to him. He beamed, ‘Aha. I’ll definitely be needed there.’

“It’s like Wei Wuxian found his children.” Li Li giggled, hand covering her mouth.

Fei Fei jokingly commented. “Would that make Hanguang-Jun the father then?”

Tang Tang suddenly gasped, then made an *aww* sound. “Imagine Hanguang-Jun and Wei Wuxian with a child. They’d have such handsome and beautiful sons and daughters.”

“But isn’t there a rumor that they have a son?” Ling Bao questioned, scratching his head.

“What?!” Tang Tang screeched.

Bichen’s sword glare brightened tenfold. With a brief slip of the hand, Shuanghua flew out of Xue Yang’s grip and Lan Wangji caught the sword.

Xue Yang had Jiangzai slash at the left arm that Lan Wangji used to grab the sword. As the attack was dodged, a chilling rage flashed within Xue Yang’s eyes. He demanded coldly, “Give me the sword back.”

Lan Wangji said, “You do not deserve this sword.”

Xue Yang made a bitter sound of laughter.

Lan Xichen smiled slightly. How fearsome his little brother was. He always thought Wangji was a much better swordsman than he was.

Wei Wuxian walked over to the disciples. Surrounded by the boys, he inquired, “Everyone alright?”

“Yes!”

“We all listened to you and held our breaths.”

“Good. If anyone doesn’t listen to me, I’ll feed him congee again.”

The juniors shivered. One of them mentioned, “That was a good threat.”

The few boys pretended as if they were vomiting. Suddenly, the sounds of footsteps came from all around them. Lan Wangji heard the sound as well. With a wave of his sleeve, he took out his guqin, Wangji.

Lan Wangji tossed Bichen to his left hand and continued to fight with Xue Yang, his attacks remaining strong. At the same time, without even turning his head, he raised his right hand and strummed across the strings. It instantly knocked out the corpses approaching them.

Lan Wangji continued to fight Xue Yang with one hand and play the guqin with the other. He'd glance across the scene, then nonchalantly curve his fingers to strum again. He somehow still seemed calm and unhurried.

Two women couldn't help but gasp. The cultivator in pink whispered, "Look at that skill level! Hanguang-Jun isn't even looking."

Her friend bit her handkerchief, muttering in a repressed voice, "He's so powerful!"

They both thought that this made Hanguang-Jun even more attractive, and then simultaneously envied Wei Wuxian even more.

Seeing this again, Wei Wuxian couldn't help but shamelessly praise his husband, deepening the envy many female cultivators were feeling right now. "Lan Zhan is both so handsome and so talented. How did my humble self get so lucky with a man like you?"

Lan Wangji hummed softly. "Wei Ying only needed to be himself. I am also very fortunate."

Wei Wuxian blushed, his smile turning small and infatuated. "Lan Zhaaan~"

Nie Huaisang was watching all this dog food behind his fan and felt very entertained at how the couple's affections were affecting the single people in the cave. Especially Jiang Cheng.

Jin Ling blurted out, "He's amazing! I'd always thought my two uncles were the two most powerful cultivators in the world. Who would've thought Hanguang-Jun is this good, apart from his technique of silencing others and his cold temper?"

"Jin Ling!" Wei Wuxian called out. When the boy turned to him, he asked, "If you were to bet between Jiang Cheng and Hanguang-Jun in a match, who do you think would win?"

"Wha-! I-!? Huh?!" Jin Ling sputtered, looking back and forth between Lan Wangji and Jiang Cheng, who had turned his eyes to him. "You can't make me answer that, Senior Wei!"

Wei Wuxian pouted. "Why not?" Slowly, a sly grin inched up his face. "Are you having second thoughts of your most powerful uncle in the world?"

Jin Ling felt the sweat on his back increase when Jiang Cheng's glare on him intensified. If he said Hanguang-Jun, he was screwed. If he said his uncle, he'd be doubly screwed with both Senior Wei and Hanguang-Jun, and even the boys of Gusu Lan sect. There was no winning here!

“W-Why don’t *you* answer that question, Senior Wei?” Jin Ling threw back, unable to find another way to escape.

Wei Wuxian blinked innocently. “Isn’t my answer obvious enough?”

His response undoubtedly caused a vein to throb angrily on Jiang Cheng’s forehead.

Lan Jingyi approved, “Well, of course Hanguang-Jun is strong. He just never likes to show it off. He is very low-key, right?”

Wei Wuxian replied in confusion, “Are you asking me? Why are you asking me?”

Lan Jingyi asked, “So you think that Hanguang-Jun is not strong?!”

Wei Wuxian touched his chin, “Hmm. He’s strong. Of course, he’s really strong. He’s the best.” As he talked, he couldn’t help but break into a smile.

Lan Wangji felt his heart pound a little faster at seeing Wei Wuxian smile because of him. He always loved it when his Wei Ying smiled, especially towards Lan Zhan.

Meanwhile, his oblivious spouse was nodding happily to his past-self’s words.

Tang Tang wanted to *aww* again. “Wei Wuxian finds his future husband strong.”

Li Li sighed. “They make such a powerful couple.”

“So Wei Wuxian likes the strong type. Understandable.” Ling Bao nodded.

“Then what about you? Do *you* have a type?” Fei Fei questioned, leaning in close. The other two also inched nearer to hear.

Ling Bao flushed. “M-Me!? I mean, I wouldn’t mind if they were handsome, strong, and financially capable like Hanguang-Jun, but as long as he’s kind to me and loves me, I’m okay with anything.”

Fei Fei couldn’t help but snort. “Financially capable. Just say rich, Bao Bao.”

Ling Bao rolled his eyes. “Well, he doesn’t *have* to be.”

The crisp tip-taps of the bamboo pole sounded once more.

“The ghost of the blind girl is here again!” One of the juniors said.

Without any hesitation, Wei Wuxian ordered, “Let’s go. Follow the sounds of the bamboo pole!”

Jin Ling was hesitant to trust the ghost but Wei Wuxian explained that she was the one who was trying to save them all along. She wanted to tell them something important before Xue Yang arrived.

“So she was a victim of Xue Yang!” A cultivator realized. Liu Dazhong nodded.

“He must also be the one cutting off the tongues of his victims,” Liu Dazhong grimly concluded. His fellow cultivators felt angry about this.

The juniors were shocked to hear Xue Yang’s name, but Wei Wuxian told them he’d explain later and that it was Xue Yang who Hanguang-Jun was fighting.

When the bamboo pole’s noises continued, Wei Wuxian pointed. “Let’s go for now.” Then he turned around and shouted, “Hanguang-Jun, it’s up to you now. We’re gonna go ahead!”

The strings of the guqin vibrated, as if someone was saying “mnn”. Wei Wuxian cracked up with a pfft.

Wei Wuxian laughed again too, giggling against Lan Wangji’s shoulder. “You’re so funny, Lan Zhan!”

“Mm.”

Jin Ling squinted, wondering where the humor was. He exchanged glances with Ouyang Zizhen who was frowning. Zizhen said, “I thought there’d be more…”

Lan Jingyi hesitated, “That was it? You are not going to say anything else?”

Wei Wuxian asked, “What else do you want me to do? What else should I say?”

Lan Jingyi demonstrated. “Why did you two not say ‘I’m worried about you. I’m staying!’, ‘Go!’, ‘No! I’m not going! If I’m going, you’re going with me!’? Is it not a must?”

As the juniors sighed at Lan Jingyi’s dramatic example, Ouyang Zizhen shook his shoulders in excitement. “Jingyi, you understand me!”

Lan Jingyi grabbed his hand. “Right? Right?! Isn’t it so much more romantic?”

Ouyang Zizhen sniffed, nodding his head rapidly.

A few of the cultivators felt amused by the antics of this particular junior and couldn’t help but snicker. Even Lan Xichen was chuckling, mostly because he couldn’t imagine his brother acting like that.

Lan Qiren shook his head at Lan Jingyi’s wild thoughts.

Wei Wuxian was open-mouthed. “Who taught you this? Who told you that this sort of conversation must happen? It’d sound fine out of my mouth, but can you even imagine your Hanguang-Jun saying such things?”

The Lan Sect’s juniors chorused, “No…”

Wei Wuxian continued, “Right? It’s a waste of time. I believe that someone as reliable as Hanguang-Jun will definitely be able to deal with it. I can just focus on my own things and either wait for him to find me or go find him myself.”

“Oh.” Ouyang Zizhen breathed. “That actually sounds more romantic for some reason.”

Lan Sizhui smiled, thinking that Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji’s synergy was already so insync even though Hanguang-Jun had only reunited with Senior Wei briefly.

After a few twists and turns, in front of them, a house stood alone in the fog that grew thicker and thicker. Somebody pushed open the door to the house. Wei Wuxian raised his foot and stepped into the house. Adjusting to the dark, he cautioned without looking back, “Watch for the threshold. Don’t trip.”

As expected, one of the boys almost tripped over the tall threshold. He complained why there was one here when it wasn’t a temple. Wei Wuxian explained that this was a place that needed a high threshold.

An older cultivator stroked his beard, thinking for a time now that Wei Wuxian had keen common sense and amazing street smarts. Although he died only a bit older than these young cultivators, his experience far outweighed their own. Truly a formidable genius, much like his husband.

After lighting up around a dozen fire talismans, it illuminated the coffin house. Jin Ling asked, “This is the so-called coffin home? Where dead people are temporarily put?”

Wei Wuxian said, “That’s right. Corpses that aren’t claimed by anyone, that would make a house ominous, or that are waiting to be buried are often put into coffin homes. It could be described as a courier station for dead people.”

Lan Sizhui asked why the threshold to the coffin home was so high, and Wei Wuxian explained it was to prevent low-level corpses that have already transformed from going outside. He went to stand in front of the threshold and proceeded to demonstrate how a corpse can’t get out of the coffin house.

Liu Dazhong nodded, his arms crossed. “This is an impressive method made by people who are not cultivators. Other coffin houses would just buy talismans to restrict their corpses, but poorer towns like this city need to think of their own creative solutions.”

Jin Ling asked, “Why did she bring us to a coffin home? Don’t tell me that it was because we won’t be surrounded by walking corpses if we’re here. Where did she go herself?”

Wei Wuxian replied, “It’s likely that we really won’t be. We’ve been standing still for so long already. Has anyone heard any walking corpses?”

The ghost of the young girl appeared on top of a coffin. She didn’t have physical form, only a spiritual body surrounded by a soft, dim aura. Both her figure and her face were small. As she sat on the coffin, she used her hand to tap on the lid. She then hopped down and circled around the coffin a few times, making hand gestures at them.

“Is that where she’s buried?”

“Maybe she wants them to bury her body and bring her peace.”

A few cultivators started guessing and the Lan Sizhui on the screen said the same.

Jin Ling guessed, "She wants us to open this coffin for her?"

Wei Wuxian opened the coffin alone and lay the lid onto the ground. Looking down, he saw a corpse.

"Xi-Xiao Xingchen's body?!" Sect Leader Yao yelped.

A cultivator from his sect gasped, hands covering his mouth. "How horrible! He was just buried there?!"

Yu Nianzhen sighed, her expression hard but sympathetic. "Another talented cultivator lost by the hands of Jin Guangyao's minions."

The girl stumbled over. She stuck her hands into the coffin and, after some searching around, she finally felt the corpse's face. Stomping her feet, tears of blood trickled down from her blind eyes again.

"So he was killed by Xue Yang," Sect Leader Yang said, looking angry.

"Then Xue Yang framed Xiao Xingchen for the death of the remaining Chang clan members by using his sword," Yu Nianzhen judged, and many cultivators revealed disgusted and displeased faces.

After the girl cried for a while, she suddenly stood up and ahh-ed at them through her clenched teeth.

Lan Sizhui asked, "Should I play Inquiry again?"

"It seems like she has a lot she wants to tell us," Lan Jingyi said.

Wei Wuxian shook his head. "There's no need. It's impossible for us to ask the right questions that she wants us to ask. And, I think her answer will be quite complex and difficult to interpret."

Lan Sizhui felt rather ashamed that he wasn't skilled enough in Inquiry to do it. He silently promised to himself, 'After I get back, I will study Inquiry with greater diligence. I will have to be as fluent, as quick, and as accurate as Hanguang-Jun.'

"A-Yuan, I didn't mean you weren't good enough," Wei Wuxian said, worried that Lan Sizhui thought he found him lacking.

Lan Sizhui's face was red as he hastily replied, "No, no! It's fine, Senior Wei. That was… that wasn't meant to be heard."

Seeing his embarrassed expression, Wei Wuxian chuckled. "It's good you want to become as good as Hanguang-Jun though. Just make sure you don't overexert yourself, and you always ask Lan Zhan questions if you don't understand something, okay? You'll become a master quicker through him than your books!"

Lan Sizhui nodded happily.

Lan Jingyi asked, "Then what should we do?"

Wei Wuxian replied, "How about Empathy?"

A myriad of shocked reactions swept throughout the cave.

"Empathy? You mean the—"

"I feel like I shouldn't be surprised that you chose something as dangerous as Empathy to hear her explanation." Jiang Cheng scowled.

Wei Wuxian shrugged. "It was the easiest method."

"What if you got yourself possessed?" Jiang Cheng spat out.

"Then Lan Zhan would find a way to help me. Besides, I trusted A-Qing. I wouldn't have done it if I thought the ghost had bad intentions." Wei Wuxian reasoned. After a pause, he smiled. "But thank you for your concerns, Jiang Cheng. It warms my heart."

Jiang Cheng sneered. "I wasn't concerned. Nothing can change what already happened. I'm just telling you so you don't do it again and make trouble."

Wei Wuxian whistled. "You might have to keep watching then."

For a brief moment, Jiang Cheng looked confused, before he realized what Wei Wuxian meant and rolled his eyes heavenward.

"Why do I bother?" he muttered to himself.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Empathy *__*

I'm gonna try my best to shorten Empathy to just one or two chapters, emphasizing only on the parts that I think would give the best reactions since that's what won the twitter poll. Once again, thank you to all my old readers who have kept on reading despite my sporadic updating sched and to my new readers who've been leaving behind new comments every chapter. ILY ALL!! <33

Grasses VI-VII

Chapter Notes

> it took me a bajillion years but we eventually made it 😭 so sorry for the long wait again...
>
> I tried to compress Empathy as much as I could so it'll end next chapter hopefully! <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Jin Ling wanted to protest but Wei Wuxian quickly didn't let him change his mind. He told Jin Ling to be the supervisor. Jin Ling pointed to himself, "Me? You want a young mast-... You want me to supervise you while you do something like this?"

"Are you saying supervising is a commoner's job, young master Jin Ling?" Lan Jingyi raised a brow, smirking at the golden-robed cultivator.

Jin Ling huffed angrily, refusing to look at anyone. "Shut your mouth."

Lan Sizhui said, "If Young Master Jin does not want to do it, I can do it as well."

Wei Wuxian asked, "Jin Ling, did you bring the Jiang Sect's silver bell?"

Jin Ling pulled out a small, simplistic bell, and Wei Wuxian stared at it for a few moments.

Suddenly, the screen changed to another scene, showing Wei Wuxian in an entirely different appearance. It was him in his original body and holding a silver bell in his hand. Wei Wuxian was telling the Ghost General, "So long as my nephew wears this silver bell, no weaker ethereal creature will be able to approach him."

After hearing such familiar words, Wen Ning felt surprise in his heart. But after the scene instantly changed back to the setting in Yi City with Wei Wuxian looking sad, Wen Ning understood that Wei Wuxian had suddenly envisioned the past.

Noticing him acting off, Jin Ling asked, "What?"

Wei Wuxian replied with a strange expression, "Nothing."

"Hold on, that's not nothing now," Jin Ling said disbelievingly. "What was that?"

"Oh, t-that's," Wei Wuxian stuttered, not expecting to suddenly see that scene either. "Something in the past. It's not important anymore." He forced out a chuckle and waved his hand flippantly. Only Wen Ning looked at his master with a glimmer of sadness.

Lan Wangji subtly turned to see Wei Ying's expression, picking up on the odd tone in his voice. He knew there was something significant about that silver bell, and he could infer what happened based on the fact that it was most likely a gift for Jin Ling, but Lan Wangji didn't want to bring it up on the chance that it was a painful memory for Wei Ying.

Jin Ling, too, felt there was something up about that memory. But noticing the subdued look on Senior Wei's face, he held in the urge to probe for more.

Meanwhile, Jiang Cheng rested his eyes on Wei Wuxian's back after hearing him ask Jin Ling for his Jiang Sect silver bell. Although the Wei Wuxian on screen explained that it could steady one's focus and calm one's mind, Jiang Cheng knew that the person undergoing Empathy needed something very familiar in order to return.

Some part of Jiang Cheng was somehow comforted by it.

He passed the bell to Lan Sizhui but Jin Ling grabbed the bell back to say he'll do it.

Lan Jingyi grumbled, "You did not want to do it, and now you do want to do it. With such a hot-and-cold temper, are you a young mistress?"

Lan Jingyi wanted to snigger at his own remark but caught sight of Lan Sizhui eyeing him, as well as Jin Ling glaring at him. 'Ah, nobody appreciates my jokes.'

Wei Wuxian let the girl slam into his soul, and Wei Wuxian slowly slid to the ground as the boys surrounded him. Wei Wuxian suddenly thought of a problem, 'The maiden is blind. If I Empathize with her, wouldn't I be blind as well and I won't be able to see a thing? The effects would plummet. Oh well, only the ears should work as well.'

"Genius idea. This'll be a very interesting storytelling," A cultivator leaning against a stone drawled boredly. He wasn't really interested to know about the full story of these people who were no longer here. Most of them were dead anyway, weren't they? What was the point?

The cultivator's senior martial brother, who was sitting beside him, rolled his eyes at the other's comment. "Hush, you. We're getting to the good part."

The bored cultivator stared strangely at his senior martial brother.

"Will we really not be able to see any of her past through Empathy?" Nie Huaisang frowned. He'd been really anticipating it.

Before anyone could answer him, the screen flashed to a clear landscape with bright colors.

The Wei Wuxian on screen thought, 'I could see!'

"Senior Wei, you're a spirit!" Ouyang Zizhen pointed out. As everyone watched, they could see Wei Wuxian floating behind A-Qing who was grooming herself by the river. Everywhere she went, he followed. Many cultivators started speaking excitedly about this discovery.

"Wow, so that's how Empathy looks like?"

“It doesn’t look so dangerous watching it like this.”

When Wei Wuxian looked at his spirit self, he was amazed and commented, “During my Empathy, it felt like I was just A-Qing the whole time.”

As she looked down at her reflection in the water, Wei Wuxian saw there were no pupils within the maiden’s eyes, only a field of white. Wei Wuxian wondered, ‘This is clearly the look of someone who’s blind, but right now I can see, can’t I?’

Lan Xichen hummed and watched the girl’s movements. “It seems she isn’t blind yet.”

Other cultivators also had the same thoughts as A-Qing walked without trouble.

“Maybe she was born with those eyes, and then Xue Yang blinded her later on.” One of the female cultivators guessed. “She saw something she shouldn’t have.”

The girl met a group of women who sympathized with her ‘blindness’ and gave her food. It was at that moment that Wei Wuxian learned her name was A-Qing and that she was born with those white eyes, allowing her to pretend to be blind.

“So she tricked people and used their sympathy to give her things.” A male cultivator scrunched his nose in displeasure.

“It’s not right, but she is clever to use her appearance to her own advantage,” A woman from another sect said.

“A-Qing…” Ouyang Zizhen said with a sad tone, staring at the screen. “I was right. She would make a pretty lady.”

Lan Sizhui patted the man’s shoulder.

In the marketplace, she pretended to be blind with her bamboo stick. She purposely ran into a middle-aged man who scolded her and before leaving, squeezed A-Qing’s buttocks with his right hand. Since they felt the same things, it was as though the squeeze landed on Wei Wuxian’s body. Instantaneously, Wei Wuxian felt as if a blanket of goosebumps climbed over his heart.

“What in heavens?!”

“Gross!”

“Rotten men.”

The girls began spilling insults at the groper.

Seeing Wei Wuxian’s disgust after feeling groped, Lan Wangji slightly pursed his lips, his eyes narrowing. He wanted to slam the man down himself.

“Lan Zhan, even if it’s not my body, I felt so wronged,” Wei Wuxian whined, pouting.

“Behave,” Lan Wangji said, but the look in his eyes told Wei Wuxian that he promised he would do something about it later. Wei Wuxian internally grinned.

A-Qing shrunk herself into a ball but as soon as the man was gone, she immediately spat on the ground and fished out the money pouch she stole. “Those lousy men, all of them are like this. Dressed as if they really are something, but they don’t have any coins. You can’t even shake a penny out of them.”

Li Li snorted before embarrassingly covering her mouth.

Ling Bao laughed and nodded his head. “I agree too. Some men are just vile *and* penniless.”

Wei Wuxian was halfway between frowning and bursting into laughter. He reminisced, ‘If you stole my money, you wouldn’t have cursed in such a way. Back then, I used to be wealthy as well…’

“And now I’m financially satisfied,” Wei Wuxian replied to his past-self, snuggling content against Lan Wangji with a grin.

Lan Qiren breathed out through his nose.

A-Qing found her next target and ran into Xiao Xingchen. Finding another blind person, she was more hesitant with her tricks. He kindly asked her to be careful and to give back the pouch she pickpocketed. The middle-aged man returned and was about to slap A-Qing when Xiao Xingchen stopped him.

Xiao Xingchen let her keep his money pouch, and A-Qing decided to follow him.

Xiao Xingchen managed to smile, “Why would you want to follow me? To become a cultivator?”

A-Qing said, “You’re tall and blind, and I’m small and blind. If we travel together, we can care for each other. My parents are gone and there’s nowhere I can stay. I’ll follow anyone to anywhere.”

Yu Nianzhen said, “She has good instincts, sticking by someone kind like Xiao Xingchen who can protect her.”

A cultivator from her Meishan Yu sect said, “And Xiao Xingchen is too nice to refuse her.”

A-Qing threatened, “I spend money really quickly. If you refuse to take me with you, the money will be gone at once, and I’ll have to go steal and trick people again. And then somebody will slap me hard and I’ll fall down and I won’t even be able to find my way. Poor me!”

Xiao Xingchen laughed, “Someone as clever as you should be able to fool others so that they can’t find their way. Who in the world can do the same to you?”

After watching for a while, Wei Wuxian discovered that, in comparison to the real one, Xue Yang’s imitation really was precise!

“I would never have suspected him at all,” said a scared junior who’d been part of the Yi City group.

“Kind of creepy that he knows how to act as Xiao Xingchen so well.” Another junior shuddered.

A-Qing clung to Xiao Xingchen the whole way. Xiao Xingchen finally gave tacit permission to her staying with him. Xiao Xingchen didn’t seem like he was going anywhere, but rather night-hunting by chance.

Wei Wuxian guessed, ‘Maybe the Yueyang Chang Clan’s case had too big of a blow on him. He didn’t want to be among the clans and sects anymore, but he couldn’t give up on his aspirations, so he chose to night-hunt as he wandered around, solving as many problems as he could.’

“What a good man,” sniffed a sensitive cultivator. “He’s blinded but he still night hunts to help people.”

“If only more cultivators were like him.” A female cultivator sighed, her eyes a little teary.

At the moment, Xiao Xingchen and A-Qing were walking along a long, flat road when she suddenly found a figure lying among the bushes. She wanted to ignore it but Xiao Xingchen suddenly stopped before he could carry her when she asked. With a serious expression, he stood up. “Something smells like blood.”

A-Qing could also smell a faint hint of blood. She bluffed, “Really? Why can’t I smell it? Are any families around the area killing livestock?”

Just as she finished speaking, the person in the bushes coughed.

“Nooo! How unfortunate.” Lan Jingyi cried out.

Jin Ling gestured wildly with his hands. “They could have averted a disaster right there!”

“But Xiao Xingchen would never ignore an injured man,” Ouyang Zizhen sadly mentioned.

Xiao Xingchen brought the filthy, bloodstained man to Yi City.

“Woah, the city back then looked better!”

“There were a lot more people too. I wonder what happened to them?”

They brought Xue Yang to the coffin house. He carefully laid the person onto the bed. Taking an elixir from his qiankun pouch, he pushed it through the person’s clenched teeth.

Xiao Xingchen touched the person’s forehead, then took out another elixir and fed it to him. After the water had been boiled, Xiao Xingchen slowly wiped off the blood on his face. Out of curiosity, A-Qing gave him a glance, and made a soundless huh.

As Wei Wuxian saw the face, his heart immediately sunk.

Just as everyone expected, it was Xue Yang. People groaned and felt bad for Xiao Xingchen facing his future killer.

One of the juniors whined. “Why is senior too kind?”

Wei Wuxian sighed in silence. He thought, ‘Enemies really can’t avoid each other, can they? Xiao Xingchen, you really are… hopelessly unlucky.’

“This must be a time when Jin Guangshan is still Chief Cultivator,” Sect Leader Yao judged while rubbing his beard.

The subordinates under him answered, “He probably ordered Jin Guangyao to eliminate Xue Yang but he escaped.”

“He’s got amazing luck to be saved by Xiao Xingchen.”

Suddenly, Xue Yang frowned. Xiao Xingchen was in the middle of inspecting and bandaging his wounds. Sensing that Xue Yang was about to wake up, he spoke, “Don’t move.”

Hearing this voice, Xue Yang’s eyes sprang open and he sat up at once. Tumbling to the corner of the room, he glared at Xiao Xingchen with a fierce expression and a careful posture. Watching the scene, A-Qing’s scalp tingled.

Wei Wuxian shouted silently, ‘Talk! Xiao Xingchen definitely wouldn’t have forgotten Xue Yang’s voice.’

“Yes, talk!”

“Reveal yourself!”

The young cultivators frantically tried to speak to the Xiao Xingchen on the screen.

Xue Yang spoke, “What…”

As soon as he spoke, Wei Wuxian knew that there was no hope. Xue Yang’s throat was injured as well.

Even the older cultivators watching made annoyed sounds.

“No, his voice is so hoarse!” A junior shouted in frustration.

“Senior wouldn’t recognize him at all.”

Sitting on the edge of the bed, Xiao Xingchen assured, “I told you not to move. Your wounds are going to open. Don’t worry. Since I saved you, of course I won’t hurt you.”

With a roll of his eyes, he coughed, “Who are you?”

A-Qing interrupted, “If you have eyes can’t you see for yourself? He’s a roaming cultivator. He went to such lengths to carry you back and saved you and even gave you magical elixirs,

yet you're so mean!"

"Oh no," Liu Dazhong muttered.

Xue Yang turned to her at once. He spoke in a cold voice, "You're blind?"

"He doesn't think she's blind?" Ling Bao was surprised. He thought her appearance made it look like she was.

"She slipped up."

Ling Bao turned his head to Liu Dazhong. He didn't think the man had heard him. Liu Dazhong's junior martial brother asked, "How did she slip up?"

Liu Dazhong responded, "She called him mean. Xue Yang had only asked who he was, but she wouldn't have known he was being mean if she had seen him rolling his eyes."

Ling Bao gaped. "I didn't even think of that?!"

She replied on the spot, "Do you discriminate against blind people? Well a blind person saved you. Or else, nobody would care even if you rotted on the side of the road! The first words you said weren't even to thank Daozhang. How rude! And you called me blind in such a tone. Hmph… What's wrong with being blind…"

"Oh, that was good! She deflected," Fei Fei said in surprise and amazement.

"If she's been tricking people with her blindness all her life, she's probably able to lie against Xue Yang," Tang Tang surmised.

Xiao Xingchen offered to help Xue Yang with his wounds and Xue Yang only accepted after a while.

Wei Wuxian could speculate what he was thinking. With a body covered in severe wounds, he couldn't go anywhere if nobody helped treat him. Since Xiao Xingchen was such an idiot that he placed himself right at his disposal, why not accept the help?

"Xiao Xingchen is just too trusting. Why can't he be more cautious?" Li Li frowned worriedly.

"That's because he's a good man." Ling Bao sighed.

Tang Tang covered her face. "I really can't watch this. I already know that they both die, this isn't going to be a good story."

Xue Yang prevented Xiao Xingchen from touching his left hand which had a pinky severed. Back then, Xiao Xingchen definitely knew that Xue Yang only had nine fingers. 'So this was why Xue Yang wore a black glove on his left hand when he was putting up his act,' Wei Wuxian thought.

After applying medicine to his wound, Xiao Xingchen bandaged it in a remarkably neat manner, "It's finished, but it's best if you don't move, or else your bones will dislocate again."

A lazy grin appeared on Xue Yang's face again, "Daozhang, so you aren't going to ask who I am? Why I was injured so badly?"

A cultivator squawked. "This guy is crazy, asking such a question?!"

"He's not scared at all because Xiao Xingchen is blind. The *scum* ." The person beside him sneered.

Xiao Xingchen softly replied, "If you won't say it, then why should I ask? I just happened to have seen you and decided to lend a hand. It's nothing difficult for me, anyways. After your injuries heal, we'd go our separate ways. If I were you, there'd also be a lot of things that I don't want others to ask about."

Wei Wuxian commented, 'Even if Xiao Xingchen asked, the little delinquent would probably make up a seamless explanation and fool him around. It was natural for people to have complicated pasts. Xiao Xingchen only avoided inquiring too much out of respect. Yet, it made it convenient for Xue Yang to use his respect.'

"Not only is Xue Yang going to use him but he's not going to let him go after." Wei Wuxian murmured to Lan Zhan, grimacing at seeing this happening again.

Understanding how hard this could be for Wei Ying, Lan Wangji held his hand and softly caressed Wei Wuxian's palm.

When Xiao Xingchen left for night-hunting, A-Qing heard Xue Yang call her from the other room, "Little Blind, come over."

A-Qing poked her head out, "What?"

"Do you want candy?"

A-Qing still refused, "I'm not eating it. I'm not going."

Xue Yang threatened sweetly, "Are you sure you're not eating it? Are you too scared of coming? But, did you think that I actually can't move? That if you don't come, I'm not going to go over and find you?"

Lan Jingyi glared. "He's so creepy, it's unnerving."

"He's just a horrendous human being." Jin Ling replied.

Hearing the strange tone of his words, A-Qing shuddered. With some hesitation, she finally picked up her pole and slowly tapped her way to the room's door. Before she could speak, a small object flew straight at her.

Wei Wuxian instinctively wanted to dodge, then he thought, 'It's a trap!' But A-Qing didn't dodge at all. She didn't even blink as she saw the object rush toward her. Instead, she let it hit her chest, then jumped back and fumed, "Hey! What did you throw at me?"

"Wah!"

"She's amazing!"

"How did she not move?"

After hearing Wei Wuxian say it was a trap, the cultivators understood Xue Yang's intentions and they were all horrified, then astonished by A-Qing's actions.

"If you've been pretending to be blind all your life, you should already know all the tricks to prove that you are," Liu Dazhong figured.

"I was really impressed with A-Qing too," Wei Wuxian softly said, smiling at the screen.

Lan Wangji saw his expression and felt sad in his heart. Wei Wuxian always felt so much for those in need, even dropping everything to go out of his way to save them.

Xue Yang replied, "It's candy, for you. I forgot that you're blind and can't catch. It landed by your feet."

She found it and ate the piece of candy. They talked for a while, and Xue Yang grinned. "When I was young, I really liked candy, but I couldn't get them no matter what and I could only watch people eat. So, I've always thought that if I become wealthier one day, I'd carry an infinite amount of candy with me."

A-Qing asked for more and Xue Yang told her she could if she came closer.

"Why would you come closer when he's so obviously trying to trick you?!" Jin Lin shrieked, shaking Lan Jingyi's shoulders.

A-Qing stood up and, with her bamboo pole, she walked toward him. Without making a sound, Xue Yang pulled Jiangzai, a sharp-edged sword out of his sleeve. He pointed the tip of the sword toward A-Qing. Sharing the same senses as A-Qing, Wei Wuxian also felt the pins and needles pricking his scalp.

"He's crazy?!"

"We knew that already."

"If she hesitated for the slightest moment, Xue Yang would know instantly."

"Heavens, I would have peed my pants!"

The juniors were all sitting in attention, nervous for the young blind lady as they blurted out commentary.

When the tip of the sword was half an inch away from her stomach, Xue Yang took it away and put it back into his sleeve. Exchanging it with two pieces of candy, he gave one to A-Qing and tossed the other one into his own mouth.

He asked, "A-Qing, where's that daozhang of yours gone to in the middle of the night?"

A-Qing licked and munched on the candy, "I think he went hunting."

Xue Yang tittered, "Hunting? More like night-hunting."

Wei Wuxian was truly amazed by how clever she was. She said "night-hunt" wrong on purpose. Since Xue Yang corrected her, in a way, he confirmed that he was also a cultivator.

After hearing Wei Wuxian's thoughts, the cultivators were even more impressed by A-Qing.

"She's not even educated but she's clever in her own way." A sect leader said, nodding in approval.

"Xue Yang failed her test! Ha!" Tang Tang snorted, finding that the most amusing.

Although Xue Yang looked scornful, his voice sounded confused, "He's blind already. How can he night-hunt?"

A-Qing raged, "You're at it again. What's wrong with being blind? Even if Daozhang's blind, he's still really cool. His sword's like whoosh, whoosh, whoosh. One word: fast." As she was prancing around, Xue Yang suddenly asked, "You can't see, so how do you know his sword is fast?"

The juniors winced again. "She needs to stop over describing things. He's going to know right away!"

"I'm going to have a heart attack."

A-Qing replied in an outraged voice, "It's fast because I say so. Daozhang's sword must be fast! It's true that I can't see, but can't I listen? Just what are you trying to say? Do you discriminate against blind people like us?" She behaved exactly like a naive girl who was bragging about the person she admired.

Xue Yang's expression finally relaxed.

"Wow, the distrust." Fei Fei shook her head. "It took him that long to believe she was blind."

Ling Bao nodded. "No wonder he managed to get away with murdering an entire clan."

A-Qing tried to complain to Xiao Xingchen about Xue Yang, but Xue Yang would interrupt them. When Xiao Xingchen realized he was walking around, he asked if he was fine.

Xue Yang said, "It'll heal faster if I walk around. And it's not that both of my legs are broken or anything. I'm used to injuries like these. I grew up beaten by others."

Seeing people's awkward expressions at Xue Yang revealing a hint of his past, Nie Huaisang commented, "Well I figured Xue Yang's life as a child must have been really hard. Probably something in his past made him who he was."

"I don't believe it. He's so evil already that young."

"But nobody is born evil." Nie Huaisang gently fanned himself, looking steadily at the cultivator who grew too embarrassed to talk back to a sect leader.

After a pause, he replied, "Oh…"

Xue Yang helped Xiao Xingchen repair the roof. Xue Yang would make witty remarks and Xiao Xingchen was easily amused, he'd start laughing after just a few sentences. Hearing how cheerful their conversations were, A-Qing moved her lips in silence. After careful scrutiny, it seemed to have sounded like "let me kill you damn thing".

Wei Wuxian felt the same as A-Qing.

After about a month, Xue Yang continued to live in this crammed coffin home with the two others.

"Why is he still with them?" Lan Jingyi groaned, even though he knew there was a reason the two ended up dead.

"Probably to torture them after gaining their trust?" Lan Sizhui suggested, though he looked pale in the face.

"That's just sick."

Today, after putting A-Qing to sleep, Xiao Xingchen was about to leave and night-hunt again when Xue Yang's voice suddenly came, "Daozhang, why don't you take me with you tonight?"

Xue Yang purposely avoided using his original voice and disguised it in another tone. Xiao Xingchen laughed, "Of course not. If you talk, I start laughing, and if I laugh, my sword won't be steady anymore."

Xue Yang replied in a piteous way, "Then I won't talk. I'll carry your sword and help you. Please don't give me the cold shoulder."

Many of them felt very uncomfortable seeing Xue Yang cozying up to Xiao Xingchen.

Wei Wuxian thought, 'Xue Yang definitely won't be so nice that he wants to help Xiao Xingchen night-hunt. If A-Qing doesn't go, she'll miss something important for sure.'

After the two left, A-Qing jumped out of the coffin and followed them from afar. Rushing over to the village, she slipped into a dog hole on the bottom of the village's fence and sneakily peeked out.

With his hands folded in front of him, Xue Yang stood on the side of the road, smiling with his head tilted. Xiao Xingchen stood on the opposite side. Calmly unsheathing his sword, Shuanghua flashed its silver sword glare before it pierced through a villager's heart.

The villager was still alive.

Gasps of horror echoed in the cave.

"They're alive?!"

“Did Xue Yang somehow trick Xiao Xingchen into killing the people in Yi City?”

“But how could Xiao Xingchen be tricked into doing that?”

Jiang Cheng scowled. “If only he’d been detained early on but both Jin Guangshan and Jin Guangyao just had to protect him.”

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: Empathy part 2~! I wanna get out of this arc so bad XD

Thank you so much for still eagerly waiting for this story! ;w;

UPDATE: because I'm getting asked a lot, yes I'll still be updating this fic, I'm just trying hard to put empathy into one last chapter so that yi city arc can end soon. sorry for the wait and thank u for ur patience 😅🙏 if anyone would like to help my motivation and support me, I have a 'coffee' linked in my twt~

Grasses VIII (1)

Chapter Notes

wow can you believe this finally updated 😭

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Xiao Xingchen sheathed his sword and spoke in a solemn voice, "How can it be that there isn't a single living person inside this village? They're all walking corpses?"

Xue Yang smiled, but his voice sounded confused, "That's right. Thankfully your sword can aim your attacks towards corpse energy, otherwise with just the two of us, we'd have trouble getting out of this encirclement."

A Gusu Lan junior exclaimed, "Corpse energy? How are they emitting corpse energy when they're still alive?"

"Corpse poisoning." Lan Sizhui patiently answered. "Sadly, Shuanghua can't tell the difference between one who just has corpse poisoning and a walking corpse without his master's sight."

"But they could still talk, no?" Another junior, who hadn't been there, questioned in confusion.

"Not if they had their tongues cut off," Lan Jingyi darkly said. The others suddenly recalled what happened to A-Qing and realized the same could have happened to those innocent people.

When they left, A-Qing sneaked out from behind the house to where the piles of corpses were and glanced around on the ground.

'Those people are…' Wei Wuxian thought as the image swirled to show a past memory of A-Qing, Xiao Xingchen, and Xue Yang being ridiculed by these dead men. These men had called them, "A big blind guy, his little blind girl, and a cripple Hahaha!" A-Qing had spat at them and brandished her bamboo pole, while Xiao Xingchen walked passed calmly, as if he didn't hear anything. Xue Yang had smiled, but his eyes held no trace of amusement.

Hearing their insults and seeing Xue Yang's reaction, Tang Tang clicked her tongue. "They just no longer wanted to live huh? Karma will always bite you back."

"Piles of dead meat the moment they finished that sentence." Fei Fei added with a nod.

"The deadest of the dead." Li Li joined in as Ling Bao nodded with pity.

A-Qing flipped over quite a few corpses. Opening their eyelids, she saw that all of them had white eyes. Livor mortis had already climbed over some of their faces. She let out a sigh of relief, but Wei Wuxian's heart sunk even lower.

"As expected..." A cultivator from the Nanhu Liu sect sighed.

Another cultivator wondered, "Could they still have been saved?"

"They had a chance," Lan Xichen answered with a tinge of sadness. "Just like the juniors who had inhaled corpse poisoning. Without Wuxian's congee, they may not have survived. Unfortunately for those people, they were up against Xue Yang."

"What a monster."

"A demon…"

Several people muttered.

A-Qing murmured, "Is the bastard really helping Daozhang?"

Wei Wuxian cautioned in silence, 'Please don't believe Xue Yang just like this!'

During one night, while they were gathered together, A-Qing asked Xiao Xingchen to tell her a story. Xiao Xingchen told her a story about an Immortal on a mountain. The Immortal accepted a lot of disciples, but she didn't let them leave the mountain.

This description was only too familiar. A lot of people instantly knew he was talking about Baoshan Sanren . But unlike everyone else who was displaying their excitement, Jiang Cheng was stiff in his seat, not moving an inch.

Yu Nianzhen thought he'd been spelled frozen without anyone realizing it. She wondered what his issue was against such a beloved immortal.

From the screen, Xiao Xingchen told the story about her first disciple who left the mountain — Yanling Daoren. When he first left the mountain, due to his mastery over his skills, everyone praised and admired him, and he became a famous cultivator of the righteous path. But afterwards, people didn't know what he was going through as his personality drastically changed, suddenly turning into the villain who had killed people without blinking twice. In the end, he died under thousands of swords.

The juniors who knew nothing about such stories leaned in excitedly to hear more. Even those who were growing bored moments ago were staring raptly at the screen, watching in fascination at how the screen illustrated the story with moving pictures and a swirl of colors.

Then he told the story of the second disciple who was an outstanding woman. The ghost of Wei Wuxian smiled.

To everyone's great surprise, especially Wei Wuxian, the screen began to show the silhouette of a woman running down a mountain as Xiao Xingchen and A-Qing's commentary continued over it.

Lan Wangji softly said, “Cangse Sanren.”

A-Qing asked, “Is she pretty?”

Xiao Xingchen replied, “I don’t know. She was said to be really pretty.”

For some cultivators, especially the juniors, it was their first time seeing the Yiling Patriarch’s mother, and their breaths were taken away by her bold beauty and mischievous smile.

Wei Wuxian was still so stunned, he couldn't make a cheeky comment about where his good looks came from.

A-Qing said, “Then, I know! There must’ve been a lot of people who liked her and wanted to marry her after she left the mountain. And then, she must’ve married a high-ranking official or the leader of a big sect! Heehee.”

Xiao Xingchen laughed, “You guessed wrong. She married the servant of the leader of a big sect, and the two lived happily ever after.”

The screen then shifted to show Cangse Sanren with another man, who was none other than Wei Changze. Wei Wuxian looked on with wide, glossy eyes, feeling choked and his chest swamped with emotions he couldn’t begin to name.

As time passed, the images of his parents began to fade a little. The clearest memory he seemed to remember of them was when they were walking down a road with a donkey, Wei Wuxian happily riding it until his father lifted him to his shoulders. All of them were smiling and laughing together. It was the best Wei Wuxian had.

Now, with their faces presented before him once more, Wei Wuxian felt as if he couldn't take everything in. Like if he accidentally blinked, he might miss out on something that he'd never be able to get back again.

Lan Wangji could tell this was important to him and didn't try to take his attention away. His own curious gaze couldn't help but roam over the features of the people he never met but dearly wished to see, to let them know how brilliant and beautiful their son had grown and how he was everything to Lan Wangji. He wished to let them know that he'd protect Wei Ying all his life, and that he wouldn't disappoint them a second time.

On the other hand, Jiang Cheng felt his own emotions stirred seeing Wei Wuxian's parents for the first time. Although he understood the pain of losing his parents, Wei Wuxian had to experience it himself twice.

He chanced a glance at Wei Wuxian’s pitiful expression and internally sighed. If Shijie were here, she’d know how to comfort him.

Xiao Xingchen told her how they accidentally lost their lives during a night-hunt, which only made A-Qing annoyed to hear about the pretty woman’s unfortunate death.

Wei Wuxian thought to himself, 'Good thing that Xiao Xingchen didn't go on and tell her that the two of them gave birth to another big villain that everyone wanted to beat up. Or else, she might be spitting about me.'

The juniors suddenly chuckled at his side-commentary.

Wei Wuxian was broken out of his trance by them and his own mouth curled up. Although the image of his parents were already gone from the screen, Wei Wuxian looked on with a bit more cheer than before. He'd just gotten the chance to see his parents again, he was happy enough.

He set his head back again on Lan Wangji's shoulder (after he'd sat up straight and almost crawled to the screen to see more of his parents), to which Lan Zhan naturally pulled him closer by the waist.

Meanwhile, Lan Qiren had a stone-cold face as usual, but inside, he'd never been more shaken until he saw that woman again in this life. He closed his eyes solemnly once as if he were in prayer, before opening and focusing on the screen again.

When A-Qing asked him if he could tell her stories about his night hunts, Xue Yang suddenly asked, "Then, Daozhang, did you used to night-hunt alone as well?"

After a pause, Xiao Xingchen smiled slightly, "No."

This got A-Qing interested, "Then who else were with you?"

This time, Xiao Xingchen's pause was longer. After a few moments, he answered, "A very good friend of mine."

An eerie light flashed inside Xue Yang's eyes and his smile grew larger.

Li Li shuddered. "The way he smiles is so creepy."

"Scary, you mean. I'd never want to meet a guy like that in the middle of the night." Tang Tang told her.

Ling Bao nodded with a serious look on his face. "Bad boys aren't my type either."

A-Qing, on the other hand, was actually curious, "Daozhang, who's this friend of yours? What sort of person are they?"

Xiao Xingchen replied calmly, "A sincere man of noble nature."

Xue Yang rolled his eyes in contempt. "Then, Daozhang, where's this friend of yours right now? Why hasn't he come to find you when you're already like this?"

Wei Wuxian thought, 'What an insidious knife.'

"Despicable." Lan Jingyi added through gritted teeth.

“Bastard!” Ouyang Zizhen cried out.

A lot of the juniors who'd seen Song Lan first hand seemed to have grown defensive over this man.

After a while of spacing out, Xiao Xingchen broke the silence, “Where he is right now, I don’t know either. But, I hope that…”

Before he finished his sentence, he patted A-Qing’s head, “Alright. That’s it for tonight. I really don’t know how to tell stories. It’s quite embarrassing.”

"Oh! It's so sad," Tang Tang cried out. "I want him and Song Lan to meet again so bad."

"They will, won't they?" Li Li said. "I mean, how else would Song Lan have…"

Fei Fei covered her mouth. "Shh, we're not going to talk about that now." She threw a discrete glance at Tang Tang who looked even more distraught at the reminder.

A-Qing replied obediently, “Oh. Okay!”

Yet, Xue Yang suddenly spoke up, “Then how about I tell one?”

A-Qing immediately agreed, “Yes, yes. You tell one.”

“Once upon a time, there was a child.”

This time the screen changed scenery again. It seemed determined to show every perspective when memories were being brought up.

Because of this, the cultivators were not prepared to see a young, disheveled looking XueYang from the past.

“What the… is this… him?”

“No way." A fierce-looking woman said. "I don’t want to see this.”

"None of us do." Another cultivator sneered at the screen.

Xue Yang told the tale of a child who liked sweets. He followed the orders of a man who promised he would give him pastries if he did what he asked. So he sent the piece of paper to the desired place, and because he did not know how to read, he didn’t realize the paper was offensive and took the brunt of the man’s insults and abuse.

A young disciple pointed out to his elder martial brother. “Someone like Xue Yang could actually have been so honest and so dim-witted when he was young. Doing whatever a stranger asked him to do.”

“It is a little pitiful to watch.” The elder martial brother said.

As expected, when the child tried to say the paper came from a man in a liquor shop, the man had already disappeared and the pastries with him. The man broke tables in his anger and ran off. The child asked a waiter with tears in his eyes, 'Where are my pastries? Where are the pastries that he said will be mine?"

"Oh, I hate this." A woman cultivator sniffed. "Why beat up a child when it's not his fault?"

"He's a stinky child from the streets, of course no one would show him mercy." An older and snider woman commented.

The waiter slapped the child a few times and kicked him out of the shop. The child crawled up and bumped into the man that made him take the letter.

The scene instantly changed back to the three inside the coffin house, and a junior exclaimed, "Eh? What happened next?"

At the same time, he heard A-Qing say, *"And then? What happened?"*

He flushed a little at being too eager to hear more. His fellow cultivators snickered at the timing.

Xue Yang lightly said, "What do you think happened? Just a few more slaps and a few more kicks."

"What's the use of sharing this story? Does he want our sympathy?" A green-robed cultivator scoffed. "No matter what, he's scum at the bottom of the barrel with no hope of rescuing. No sob story is ever going to change my mind."

"It's not that," Wei Wuxian softly replied, "We're not supposed to be looking at Xue Yang and analyzing his actions as a child. He didn't know better. It's the adults who should've."

"The adults?" The cultivator in green asked in confusion.

Wei Wuxian nodded. "Not only those two men but the waiter as well. All three didn't care about the feelings of a boy and just beat him up."

"I understand that the first two were awful people, but the waiter was just doing his business and this beggar kid got in the way." A female cultivator shared her thoughts.

"So that means justifying hitting a child?" Wei Wuxian challenged. Having experienced almost the same thing Xue Yang did, Wei Wuxian couldn't help but get a little passionate. "I'm sure this is one of many instances Xue Yang experienced when he was young, but it shaped the way he grew up. He had no one to show him compassion and kindness, and it fed the resentment in him."

"And what does that have to do with us?" The green-robed cultivator raised his brow.

"Nothing." Sect Leader Yang cut in. "It's nothing to do with us because we're cultivators. We cultivate to reach immortality, and we use our abilities to resolve spiritual and demonic issues that disturb the peace. Don't be confused by the Yiling Patriarch's big words." Sect Leader

Yang snorted as he stared down at Wei Wuxian. "Look at how his last life began and ended. He was lucky enough to get a second chance.”

Wei Wuxian scowled. "So you're saying abused kids aren't an issue until they become a problem to the sect? Xue Yang almost got away with murdering hundreds of people because a bunch of cultivators sheltered him and gave him protection."

"The Lanling Jing sect was corrupt and greedy for power." A cultivator shouted in support to his Sect Leader.

"And who here didn't greed for the power of the Stygian Tiger Amulet during the First Siege?" sneered Jiang Cheng, finally unable to hold his temper.

There were a few Sect Leaders whose expressions showed that they were unwilling to confess to such sin. But their silence was answer enough.

A-Qing replied in a few words what she would have done, swinging her arms and legs. Xiao Xingchen told them it was time to rest. After Xiao Xingchen tucked her, he walked a few steps, then asked, “What happened afterward?”

Xue Yang said, “Guess. There was no afterward. You didn’t continue telling your story either, did you?”

Xiao Xingchen replied, “No matter what happened afterward, since right now your life is fairly adequate, there’s no need for you to dwell too much on the past.”

Fei Fei sighed. “If only he wasn’t giving his advice to a waste like Xue Yang.”

"I'm not sure about that." Ling Bao interjected. "I feel like if anyone could have helped Xue Yang be guided down a better path, it would have been Xiao Xingchen."

Hearing these words, Liu Dazhong turned his head and couldn't help but ask, "You say this even after seeing all that he has done to him?"

Startled at being addressed, Ling Bao thought of his question and nodded. "It's because of what I've seen and heard about Xue Yang that I'm surprised he hasn't done anything to ruin the harmony within their little trio yet."

"Maybe he's just biding his time." Tang Tang speculated. "So that he can get everybody killed by Xiao Xingchen's hand."

"Don't tell me you got soft after seeing his past?" Fei Fei asked with a raised brow. Though she didn't sound mean when asking it.

Ling Bao scratched the back of his head sheepishly. "Maybe I did."

Liu Dazhong smiled at their interactions and turned back around to watch.

When Xiao Xingchen came back from night hunting alone, he put his hand inside A-Qing’s coffin. She only opened her eyes again after Xiao Xingchen left the coffin home and found a

small piece of candy beside her straw pillow.

She stuck her head out and looked into the bedroom. Xue Yang wasn't asleep either. He sat at the table, looking at the piece of candy lying silently on the edge of the table.

Lan Wangji slightly tilted his head, realizing something. Noticing the movement of his husband, Wei Wuxian smiled and said, "You get it now right? It's a little bittersweet when you think about his ending."

"It's still no more than what he deserved." Lan Wangji solemnly said.

Wei Wuxian hummed. No matter how pitiful a man's life was in the past, the actions he did in the present showed what kind of person he was asking to be treated. There was no going forward after ruining the only light that shined upon you in the darkness. Wei Wuxian had once lost his but thankfully, there was another willing to replace it.

After that night, Xiao Xingchen would give both of them a piece of candy everyday. Perhaps it was because of the candy that they managed to gain a long period of relatively peaceful days.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter: More Empathy. More sadness.

This was a super long wait (apologies for that!!!) but I really wanted to finish all of Empathy in this chapter. ;w; Unfortunately, I have had enough looking at this doc that I've decided to cut it in parts XD;; I know many have been waiting for an update (what with all the daily dms and comments I get to update lol… but I'm amazed there are still new readers finding this fic! thank you so much for giving this a chance ;__;)

if anyone wants to help push my motivation to get updates faster (and in a more efficient way than just bombarding my comment section 😅), I accept 'coffee' which you can find the link on my twt~

Grasses VIII (2)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Everyone watched the trio's everyday lives and how a weird sort of harmony seemed to settle among them. They even got to see Xue Yang helping Xiao Xingchen and A-Qing bargain for half the prices on fresh vegetables. It was an odd scenario until they saw *how* exactly Xue Yang accomplished it.

"What poor character." Lan Jingyi sniffed, talking about the vendor who was trying to sell old produce to the blind.

"This might be one of the few times we see Xue Yang actually doing something erm… not so bad for someone," Lan Sizhui noted.

Jin Ling watched the vendor look near ready to piss himself from fright before snorting. He sarcastically commented, "Yeah, he's being a real saint here."

"Well, it's for his benefit too. Better ingredients means better food." Ouyang Zizhen cut in with a shrug.

As A-Qing wandered off happily, she thought 'Maybe the rotten guy isn't too bad? But I can't let my guard down around him…'

"How stupid of her to think of even trusting Xue Yang." A cultivator snidely commented. He was abruptly jabbed on the side by a female cultivator beside him.

"Don't be rude. She's just a child and didn't know who Xue Yang was. She was lucky enough to have survived this long beside him." She reprimanded him.

Suddenly, a voice came from behind her, "Young Maiden, if your eyes can't see, it's best if you don't run so fast."

A-Qing turned around to see a tall cultivator who wore black robes, standing a few meters away from her.

"Who's that?" A junior asked.

"Did you forget? That's Song Lan! You've seen him before." His martial brother said with a roll of his eyes.

"I saw him *dead, not* alive. How could I have recognized him when he was all dirty and corpse-like?" The junior countered with a huff before taking another look at the screen. "He looks so much different."

No kidding. The martial brother was tempted to make another snide comment before he decided to just ignore him and continue watching.

"He has the same bearing as Xiao Xingchen." Lan Shizhui noticed.

“Oh yeah, isn’t that how A-Qing met Daozhang? It’s almost exactly the same!” Lan Jingyi realized.

Song Lan reprimanded A-Qing to be more careful in the streets. Wei Wuxian commented, ‘They really are good friends, aren’t they? Good friends would have to be similar in character.’

"That's what I said," Lan Jingyi pointed to himself with his chest puffed out proudly.

Jin Ling muttered under his breath, “But Shizui said it first…”

A-Qing tittered, “A-Qing thanks Daozhang!”

Song Lan nodded and continued walking, but A-Qing couldn’t help but turn around to watch him. After he walked for a while, he stopped a passerby, “Excuse me. Has anyone seen a blind cultivator who carries a sword in the area?”

The passerby replied, “I’m not too sure. Daozhang, you can try asking the people over there.”

Song Lan replied, “Thank you.”

"Oh he's looking for Xiao Xingchen!" Tang Tang said.

"I hope he gets to meet him before Xiao Xingchen…" Li Li’s voice trailed off, but her friends understood her.

"Well, we already know Song Lan died because of a certain someone's sword, right?" Fei Fei commented, her face sober.

Li Li’s eyes widened. “But...But couldn’t it be because Xue Yang wielded his sword--”

“No, he specifically said Xiao Xingchen’s name. We’ve already seen just how easily Xue Yang could manipulate him to kill people.”

The painful reminder had the group fall into a deathly silence.

"Alright. That's it. I'm going to sleep. Good night." Ling Bao waved his hand as he turned around and found a rock to lay his head on.

"But there's no night and day here?" Tang Tang asked, bewilderment coloring her features.

"Yeah, and what about the rest of the Empathy? You’re going to miss out!" Li Li shook Ling Bao's shoulders.

Ling Bao batter her hands away, whining. "Just wake me up when it’s over! I don’t want to watch a tragedy we all know is waiting to happen!"

A-Qing tapped her way over, "Daozhang, why are you searching for the other daozhang?"

Song Lan immediately turned around, "Have you seen him?"

A-Qing said, "Maybe I have, but maybe I haven't."

A-Qing asked him a few questions to make sure he was a friend. Song Lan hesitated before saying they were. Wei Wuxian wondered, 'Why did he hesitate?'

A-Qing also felt that his answer was somewhat reluctant. Her suspicion grew as she asked about Xiao Xingchen's appearance and sword. Song Lan answered straight away, "His height is similar to mine. His appearance is rather fine. His sword is carved with patterns of frost."

Seeing that he answered everything correctly and didn't look like a bad guy, A-Qing responded, "I know where he is. Daozhang, follow me!"

A cultivator blinked in amazement. "She believed him just like that?"

"It's the Daozhang charm." His friend remarked with a snort.

"But he didn't even question how a blind girl like her would know about Xiao Xingchen's appearance and his sword." He said.

"Even if it was strange," Liu Dazhong cut in, having heard the man's question. "I think A-Qing just wanted the fastest and surest way to know if Song Lan was a friend or foe to her Daozhang."

Song Lan had already been travelling in search of his close friend for a few years, and had been disappointed countless times. Now that he finally heard news of him, he couldn't even believe his ears. He managed with effort, "... Thank... Thank you..."

A-Qing led him until they were near the coffin home, yet Song Lan stopped in his tracks. A-Qing asked, "What's wrong? Aren't you gonna go over?"

For some reason, Song Lan's face was extremely pale as he stared at the door of the coffin home. Wei Wuxian guessed, 'Maybe he's nervous since they haven't seen each other for so long?'

"Isn't it because he saw Xue Yang?" Lan Jingyi said in confusion.

"Maybe it's because he thought A-Qing was leading him to Xiao Xingchen's coffin since they were walking to a coffin house and he thought he must be dead?" Jin Ling gave his own thoughts as well.

"Good assumptions. Though I don't know which of us is correct." Wei Wuxian grinned at the juniors.

Just as he made up his mind and was about to go in, a lackadaisical figure strolled inside before he could.

Song Lan's face instantly went from pale to ashen! Song Lan asked about the boy and A-Qing replied that he was a bastard who never told them his name. She added that he was saved by Daozhang and was now stuck to him at all times. The two of them silently approached the coffin home, one standing beside the window and the other hiding beneath it.

"What is he doing?" An anxious cultivator wondered aloud. "He should just attack Xue Yang together with Xiao Xingchen. The two of them against one would be able to beat him, right?"

"You've got your hopes way too high, kid." An older woman sighed morosely near him. "The ending for these people is already set in stone."

"I can still dream!"

In the coffin home, Xiao Xingchen asked, "Whose turn is it today?"

The instant he heard the voice, Song Lan's hands trembled so much.

They listened to Xue Yang and Xiao Xingchen sharing a very casual and friendly conversation that must have been surprising for Song Lan. After a moment of silence, Xue Yang laughed, "Yours is short. I win. You're going!"

Xiao Xingchen said with reluctance, "Alright. I'll go."

Wei Wuxian cheered, 'Great. Come outside, quick. It's best if Song Lan grabs him and runs as soon as he's out.'

"Yes, do it!"

"Take him out of there!"

Tang Tang and Fei Fei shouted agitatedly, holding onto each other. Li Li had taken refuge beside Ling Bao, biting onto her handkerchief.

However, before he walked very far, Xue Yang spoke up, "Come back. I'll go."

Xiao Xingchen asked, "Why are you willing to go, now?"

Xue Yang stood up as well, "Are you an idiot? I tricked you. I picked the shorter one. It's just that I've been hiding the longest stick behind me, so whichever one you pick, I can take out a longer one. I'm just exploiting the fact that you can't see."

He laughed at Xiao Xingchen some more and sauntered out, holding a basket in his hand. A-Qing looked up at Song Lan, whose entire body was shaking.

"It must have been so difficult." Lan Xichen mumbled, his gaze heavy and forlorn.

Lan Wangji agreed with a soft hum. Although, if he imagined himself in Song Lan's position, he didn't think he would have had the same amount of self-control as Song Lan did. To not just attack the enemy and expose all his lies in front of his most precious person right then and there.

She didn't understand why he was so angry. Only after the two walked some distance away did Song Lan start asking A-Qing about the details. He found out that Xue Yang had been staying with the blind duo for a couple of years and Xiao Xingchen never found out Xue Yang's identity. When A-Qing told him that Xue Yang had gone night hunting with Daozhang, Song Lan frowned, thinking that Xue Yang probably wouldn't be so nice, "Night-hunt? Night-hunt what things? Do you know?"

A-Qing replied, "They used to often night-hunt walking corpses, sometime in the past. Now it's usually ghosts, animals that behave weirdly, and so on."

"His priorities had started to change…" Wei Wuxian said, eyebrows furrowed together in thought. He hadn't noticed it the first time but hearing A-Qing relay their history again, it seemed like Xue Yang had gone from humiliating and manipulating Xiao Xingchen to… just acting normal around him.

Wei Wuxian sighed, unsure of what to feel. "He found it a little too late."

Song Lan continued, "Is the daozhang close with him?"

Although she didn't want to admit it, A-Qing still confessed, "I think that Daozhang is really unhappy when he's alone… He's finally got someone who cultivates as well… So, I think he sorta likes listening to the bastard tell jokes."

Song Lan's face was clouded with both rage and devastation. Amid the confusion, only one thing was for certain: He definitely couldn't tell Xiao Xingchen about this!

" *That's* the conclusion he came up with!" Jin Ling burst out. He gestured wildly in the air and then tugged at strands of his hair as if words couldn't describe the shock he was feeling.

"Could you imagine what Xiao Xingchen would have felt if he found out who he'd been with all those years?" Ouyang Zizhen reminded him.

Jin Ling turned to him with a scowl. "Screw saving face. They should have teamed up together to face Xue Yang and beat him once and for all!"

Lan Jingyi rolled his eyes. "It's not that simple, idiot. What if Xiao Xingchen wasn't in the right mindset to fight after the devastating blow of the truth? Not to mention, he would discover what Xue Yang made him do to those innocent people and would probably go even crazier."

Jin Ling opened his mouth to retaliate, but having no immediate rebuttal to that, he grimaced and clenched his teeth.

Lan Sizhui added. "I don't think we could blame Song Lan for wanting to keep his friend blissfully ignorant."

"But in the end…" Jin Ling couldn't continue, his lower lip wobbling.

He cautioned, "Don't tell the daozhang anything unnecessary."

As soon as he finished, he went toward the direction that Xue Yang left in. A-Qing asked, "Daozhang, are you going to beat up that bastard?"

Song Lan was already far away from her. Wei Wuxian thought, 'Way more than beat him up. He's going to chop Xue Yang into pieces!'

Wei Wuxian winced at his internal thoughts. A lot of the cultivators in the cave were starting to grow more antsy and anguished at this point, feeling helpless at the fact that they couldn't do anything to stop this tragic downfall.

Ling Bao groaned into his makeshift rock pillow, still able to hear everything even without seeing it.

Xue Yang went outside holding the vegetable basket. A-Qing knew the path he took so she took a shortcut and hid amongst the bushes, moving along with him. Xue Yang held a basket in one hand, which was filled with cabbages, carrots, steamed buns, and other food. He walked as he yawned lazily. He had probably finished shopping.

Suddenly, Song Lan's cold voice came from in front of her, "Xue Yang."

Xue Yang's expression became scary at once.

Song Lan came out from behind a tree. His sword had already been unsheathed. Xue Yang pretended to be surprised, "Oh, isn't this Daozhang Song? What a rare guest. You here to get a free meal?"

Song Lan lunged with his sword.

Every cultivator in the cave sat in tense silence as the two cultivators fought, feeling as though the climax of this Empathy was reaching its peak.

At some point, Wei Wuxian had clutched Lan Wangji's hand in his, finding comfort in his husband's grip. Though this fight scene was nothing new to him, Wei Wuxian knew it was only going to get tougher from here.

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter: The Reason Why We Love/Hate The Yi City Arc

Grasses - VIII (3)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They exchanged blows and words as they fought. Xue Yang even managed to put down his basket of groceries under a tree. As he injured Xue Yang, Song Lan questioned why he would help Xiao Xingchen with his night hunts.

Although Xue Yang was pierced by a sword on his arm, his expression didn't change, "You really wanna hear it? I'm afraid that you might go mad. Some things you'd be better off not knowing."

"Eugh," Li Li shuddered at the sight.

Tang Tang winced. "How is he not screaming in pain?"

"I wouldn't be surprised if he was actually a corpse." Fei Fei said, only half-joking.

Ling Bao's voice came off-handedly from the side, "These side comments are convincing me more not to look."

Song Lan's voice was colder than ever, "Xue Yang, my patience is running out!"

With a clang, Xue Yang blocked an attack that was aimed at his eyes. He told Song Lan all the trickery he did on Xiao Xingchen during their night hunts. He explained it in an extremely detailed way. Both SongLan's arm and sword were trembling, "You monster… You lowliest scum..."

Even A-Qing was in shock.

Xue Yang sighed, "Daozhang Song, sometimes I feel that you educated folks really have it tough when cursing others. Over and over, it's just those few words. There's absolutely no novelty, no damage done. I stopped using those terms since I was seven."

A young cultivator who came from poorer origins couldn't help but agree. "The curses people throw at in my village are downright dirtier compared to people in sects."

"Uncouth language is not proper for us cultivators." A sect leader loudly said with a sniff.

The rogue cultivator snorted at the back.

Song Lan was in a towering rage. He attacked again, this time aiming at his throat, "You imposed upon his blindness and fooled him terribly!"

Xue Yang managed to dodge it, but it pierced his shoulder nonetheless. As if he couldn't feel anything, he didn't even flinch.

“Yeah, the corpse theory is starting to get stronger.” Fei Fei continued with a nod, her eyes squinting warily.

“His blindness? Daozhang Song, have you forgotten who he dug out his own eyes and became blind for?”

Hearing this, both Song Lan’s face and movements stiffened.

Xue Yang continued, “After I wiped out the Baixue Temple, what did you say to Xiao Xingchen?”

Song Lan was in a terrible state of mind, “I! At the time, I…”

The screen flashed to a memory of that time. With blood running down his face from his injured eyes, Song Lan said to Xiao Xingchen, “From now, we won’t need to meet again.” And Xiao Xingchen looked devastated and worried behind him.

Xue Yang cut him short, “He listened to your request and disappeared after he dug out his eyes for you, but why have you come to him now? Aren’t you making things a bit too difficult for him? Isn’t that right, Daozhang Xiao Xingchen?”

Hearing this, Song Lan wavered. His attacks hesitated as well!

“Xue Yang is tricking him to lower his guard.”

“He’s messing with this mind!”

The cultivators grew increasingly worried as Song Lan’s once elegant movements began to falter.

Xue Yang then threw corpse-poisoning powder over the distracted Song Lan.

He accidentally breathed in quite a large amount. Song Lan started to cough. However, Xue Yang’s Jiangzai had long been waiting. With a cold flash of the sword’s tip, it shot straight into his mouth!

Most of the juniors and those with weak hearts closed their eyes before they could see it, but the sounds were still terrifying to hear.

However, Wei Wuxian’s eyes widened as he realized that he could see what was happening even if A-Qing’s eyes had closed shut at this moment, preventing him from seeing Song Lan’s tongue getting cut off during the Empathy.

It really was just as gruesome as he imagined it to be.

‘How odd,’ Wei Wuxian thought, his mind turning as the tragic events continued to unfold in front of everyone.

Song Lan managed to keep standing, leaning on his sword. With his other hand, he covered his mouth. Blood seeped incessantly from between his fingers.

Despite being in so much agony, Song Lan still pulled his sword from the ground and staggered toward Xue Yang. Xue Yang dodged the attack easily. A bizarre smile was on his face.

The next moment, Shuanghua's silver glare pierced into Song Lan's chest, then came out from his back.

Realizing what happened a split second later, plenty of cultivators shouted, "No!" and all kinds of exclamations echoed inside the cave as the outcome of the battle brought everyone into a horrified state.

Song Lan looked down at Shuanghua's blade, which penetrated his heart, then slowly looked up again. He saw Xiao Xingchen, who calmly held the sword.

Wei Wuxian swallowed with difficulty. Whenever he remembered the way Song Lan looked at Xiao Xingchen in his final moments, it never failed to bring him so much grief.

Even Lan Wangji could not be unaffected. He bowed his head in grief, sending silent prayers to the two unfortunate souls caught in this tragedy. He and Wei Wuxian also hadn't stopped their hand-holding, knowing that the support was greatly needed now.

Xiao Xingchen wasn't at all aware of the situation, "Are you there?"

Song Lan moved his lips soundlessly.

Xue Yang grinned, "I am. Why are you here?"

Xiao Xingchen pulled out Shuanghua and returned it to its sheath, "Shuanghua behaved strangely. I followed its guidance and came to see." He wondered, "We haven't seen any walking corpses in this area for quite a while, not to mention one that roamed alone. Did it come here from somewhere else?"

Slowly, Song Lan fell to his knees before Xiao Xingchen.

The atmosphere in the cave quickly became downcast. Some cultivators were trying their best to hold it in, some were crying their hearts out, while others couldn't bear to watch any longer.

Meanwhile, some decided to voice their dissatisfactions out loud.

"Foolish," Sect Leader Yang exclaimed, slamming his fist on a rock pile. "If Song Lan hadn't allowed himself to be tricked by a couple of words, he could've beaten Xue Yang so easily."

His subordinates nodded, and one even added. "What's the point of a high cultivation base if he couldn't stay collected in battle?"

"It's truly a shame that a great cultivator like him died in such a way."

Wei Wuxian ground his teeth in annoyance and spoke up to be heard, "If any of you haven't forgotten, Song Lan was only human too. If somebody taunted you with your greatest fears

and weaknesses while in battle, I doubt any of you would be so calm."

Sect Leader Yang sneered, "That remains to be seen. And of course, the solution to that would be to keep your secrets close and not to your enemies. Song Lan was an open book to Xue Yang."

"And was it his fault that Xue Yang was the cause of many of Song Lan's misery in life?" Wei Wuxian shook his head, frowning. "He was up against the one person who knew exactly where to make it hurt He didn't stand a chance."

Listening to this, Lan Xichen closed his eyes in sympathy.

Xue Yang glanced down at him, "Probably. It's making awful noises."

The spirit of Wei Wuxian thought, 'if Song Lan passed his sword to Xiao Xingchen's hands, Xiao Xingchen would've immediately known who he was. He'd be able to recognize the sword of his closest friend with just a touch.'

'But he didn't do so.'

"*Heavens*, even till the end, he didn't want Xiao Xingchen to know what happened because he knew it would ruin him forever." Ouyang Zizhen said before bursting into tears, unable to stop crying since the moment Xiao Xingchen arrived.

"This is way worse than how Senior Wei described it." Lan Jingyi sniffled, trying to blink through wet eyes.

"I think I might have preferred knowing less than knowing it all in full detail." Lan Sizhui was in tears just like the rest of them, his cheeks stained with tear streaks. The juniors around them weren't doing any better. Jin Ling looked as though he wanted to cry but wanted to hurl out curses as well.

It wasn't different from the look his Uncle Jiang Cheng was sporting.

'And Xue Yang was only so bold because he knew this.' Wei Wuxian continued the thought sadly. Xue Yang turned to Xiao Xingchen, "Let's go. It's time to cook dinner. I'm hungry already."

Xiao Xingchen asked, "Have you bought the vegetables?"

Xue Yang replied, "Yep. I ran into this thing on my way back. What a bad day."

Xiao Xingchen left first. Xue Yang patted the wounds on his shoulder and arm. He picked up the basket again and, as he passed Song Lan, he smiled and looked down, "No food for you."

"That fucking piece of *shit*!" Fei Fei cursed loudly, finally unable to contain her emotions. She was uncaring of the eyes that fell on her due to her outburst, but no one said a word to reprimand her as a lot of people were feeling the same way.

“He didn’t deserve this. He just wanted to find his friend again.” After saying this, Fei Fei broke down and Tang Tang drew her friend into an embrace, crying with her over the injustice done to Song Lan.

“If Xue Yang were still alive, I would chop him up into tiny bits and feed him to the animals.” Another cultivator said darkly, his handkerchief twisted into shreds all over his lap.

“I hope he died a slow, painful death.” A woman from Meishan Yu sneered.

Yu Nianzhen glanced at her before saying, “No matter what kind of death he experienced, we’d have to thank Hanguang-Jun and Wei Wuxian for that.”

After Xue Yang was long gone, A-Qing finally stood up from behind the bush.

She wobbled to Song Lan, whose kneeling corpse had already stiffened. Although she was scared, A-Qing reached out to close Song Lan’s eyes. She then kneeled in front of him and put her palms together, “Daozhang, please don’t blame me or the other daozhang. If I came out, I’d die anyways, so I had to hide and couldn’t help you. The other daozhang was fooled by that bastard as well. He didn’t do it on purpose. He didn’t know that you were the one he killed!”

She sobbed on, “I’m going back now. Please, let your deceased spirit bless me so that I can get Daozhang Xiao Xingchen out of there, bless us so that we can escape the demon’s control. I must not let that monster Xue Yang die in peace. I must cut him into pieces so that he never enters reincarnation again!”

A female cultivator shook her head in awe. "She's so brave. She knows that man could easily kill her now but she still went back to save her Daozhang."

"She's probably braver than a few of us here." A woman in the same sect snorted.

After her speech, she kowtowed on the ground three loud times, then walked in the direction of Yi City.

Li Li, with tears in her eyes, turned when a loud sobbing noise erupted beside her and she found Ling Bao also crying his eyes out.

“I thought you said you wouldn’t look?” Li Li said accusingly.

“I didn’t want to.” Ling Bao sniffed, his nose a bright pink. “But then everyone started shouting and cursing and I couldn’t resist.” He wiped at his face but it was no use as more tears fell. “Now, I regret it because... because *wuuu* Song Lan! A-Qing!”

Li Li joined him in tandem. “*Wuuu!*”

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter: Still a bit more of the hate/love... but more of the hate 😅

Grasses - VIII (4)

Chapter Notes

Surprise!!! and Happy Birthday to meeee~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When A-Qing returned to the coffin home, Xiao Xingchen asked, "A-Qing, where did you go today? It's already so late."

Xue Yang glanced at her. "What's wrong? Her eyes are so swollen."

He looked suspicious.

"That Xue Yang is too sharp." A cultivator said worriedly.

"How can she keep calm after witnessing that? She's just a little girl." His companion muttered beside him.

"She won't be exposed here, right? Right?" A junior, who wasn't there, shook his fellow cultivator anxiously.

Suddenly, A-Qing threw the bamboo pole onto the ground, and started wailing. She flew into Xiao Xingchen's arms. "Am I ugly? Am I ugly? Daozhang, you have to tell me. Am I really that ugly?"

Xiao Xingchen instantly comforted her and told her she was pretty. A-Qing cried harder when Xue Yang said she looked uglier when she cried. She stomped her feet, "Well, Daozhang, it's not like you can see! What's the use if you say I'm pretty? You're definitely lying to me! He can see. He said I'm ugly, so I must really be that ugly! Both ugly and blind!"

The juniors blinked, slightly dazed by the girl's acting as they feared she would break down on the spot, but the adults instantly understood.

"The girl's acting is tremendous." A cultivator, who'd been impressed by her behavior against Xue Yang's tests before, was once again awestruck.

"I would be stuttering and trembling in fear after seeing what Xue Yang did. How could she think so quickly on the spot?" The anxious man scrunched his robe with two fists.

A female cultivator sitting at the front snorted and turned her head back with a mocking look. "You call yourself a cultivator while a little girl could handle herself against Xue Yang?"

The cultivator's face turned red. "That… that…!"

A-Qing then asked if she could borrow some money so that she could buy pretty clothes and jewelry. She asked Daozhang if he could come with her.

Wei Wuxian thought to himself, 'So she wants to lead Xiao Xingchen out of here. But if Xue Yang wants to follow, what should she do?'

Xiao Xingchen agreed but said he couldn't help her see but Xue Yan interjected that he could.

A-Qing jumped so high that she almost hit Xiao Xingchen's chin. "I don't care, I don't care! I only want you! I don't want him beside me at all. All he'll say is that I'm ugly! And he'll call me Little Blind!"

"Isn't she just amazing, Lan Zhan? She could so easily fool Xue Yang with her acting." Wei Wuxian laughed.

Lan Zhan inclined his head. "She would have made a good cultivator." *A clever and troublesome one like you* , he fondly completed in his mind.

Wei Wuxian hummed with a nod, thinking about it. "If Xiao Xingchen were there to help, she might have wanted to. But hopefully, the two of them are at peace now."

They finally decided that A-Qing would go with Xiao Xingchen to the market tomorrow.

She had been so nervous that, during dinner, the hand that she held her bowl with was still trembling. Xue Yang was sitting right at her left. As he glanced sideways at her, her legs stiffened again.

"So she still feels fear like us." A junior commented wryly. "The first time I heard about these events from Senior Wei, I thought she was fearless. I really don't know how she survived years with a madman."

"Sometimes, it is those who we least expect that show the greatest bravery in times of need." Lan Xichen glanced at the Lan juniors nearby. "I hope you're learning a thing or two from her."

The juniors nodded like obedient little chick.

Master Lan heavily refuted, "Now, our juniors don't need to learn such…dramatics to get their way out of such cases."

"But Senior Wei does it all the time and wins!" Lan Jingyi couldn't help but say. He hurriedly bowed his head after receiving Master Lan's glare.

Wei Wuxian snickered against Lan Wangji's shoulder.

Since she was too frightened to eat anything, she conveniently pretended that she was too furious to have an appetite. She spat the food out every time she had a bite. Stabbing her bowl, she muttered and cursed, "You damned bitch. You filthy maid. Well I don't think you're any better, slut!"

“Pfft,” Tang Tang coughed through a laugh, muffling it with her fist. “Sorry, that was too funny.”

Fei Fei chuckled. “I’m with you. I really like this girl.”

“It’s too bad that we know what will become of her.” Li Li sighed.

“Ahh, please don’t remind me.” Ling Bao complained with despair.

After they finished, Xiao Xingchen cleaned up the bowls and chopsticks, and went in the central chamber again. A-Qing wanted to follow him inside, but Xue Yang suddenly called her, “A-Qing.”

A-Qing’s heart immediately skipped a beat. “Why did you suddenly call my name?!”

Xue Yang said, “Didn’t you say yourself that you didn’t wanna be called Little Blind?”

“Feels like that’s the first time Xue Yang called her A-Qing.” Liu Dazhong noticed.

“What about it?” One of his junior martial brothers asked.

“Maybe he senses something off.” Liu Dazhong speculated.

Then Xue Yang offered her tips on what she should do the next time others curse at her. “If someone calls you ugly, then make her even uglier. Cut a few dozens of times on her face so that she’ll never have the guts to go outside again. If someone calls you blind, then carve one end of your pole sharp, and stab once in both of her eyes so that she’ll also be blind. Then, see if she dares to bad mouth you again.”

Everybody’s blood ran cold.

“Fuck. I don’t know how many times I have to say it but he’s fucking sick, that guy.” Someone shuddered in disgust.

A-Qing pretended as if she thought he was frightening her, “You’re scaring me again!”

Xue Yang snorted, “Well, think what you want.”

As he finished, he pushed the plate that held the rabbit-shaped apple slices in front of her, “Eat up.”

Looking at the plate of cute, delicate slices, disgust filled both A-Qing’s and Wei Wuxian’s hearts.

Tang Tang shook her head in confusion. “He’s so weird. He acts nice by giving her advice and cutting apples for her. But at the same time…”

“Like there’s a double meaning to it? I *know* .” Fei Fei replied.

“Well, he always likes to tease and mock her, doesn’t he?” Li Li said.

“But they’ve been together for how many years in that coffin house. Maybe he does have a little soft spot for A-Qing.” Ling Bao thought aloud. When he saw the girls turn to stare at him, he stuttered. “O-or maybe not and he’s just messing with her.”

“As nice as that thought is,” Tang Tang softly said, smiling sadly. “A-Qing and Xiao Xingcheng died because of Xue Yang.”

The next day, with Xue Yang going out to buy food, A-Qing made sure he was long gone before she asked Xiao Xingchen in a trembling voice, “Daozhang, do you happen to know someone called Xue Yang?”

Xiao Xingchen’s smile froze and all of the blood drained from his face. His lips were almost a shade of pink-tinted white.

“Finally, he knows!” A junior exclaimed in relief. But then cried out when a fellow martial sister jabbed him on the rib.

“That’s not a good thing! Now he’ll know all the horrible things Xue Yang made him do. It’s going to be awful.” The girl said, biting her fingernails nervously.

Many other cultivators were feeling the same, not looking too optimistic about Xiao Xingchen’s reaction to Xue Yang’s deception.

Xiao Xingchen asked in a low voice, “… Xue Yang? A-Qing, how did you learn of this name?”

“Xue Yang is the person with us! He’s that bastard!”

Xiao Xingchen stammered in confusion, “The person with us? … The person with us…” He shook his head, as though he was feeling somewhat dizzy, “How did you know?”

A-Qing said, “I heard him kill someone!”

Xiao Xingchen asked, “He killed someone? Who did he kill?”

A-Qing blurted out, “A woman!”

“Huh? A woman? Why did she lie?” The same junior asked confusedly.

"Would you like to know if you killed your own best friend?" Lan Jingyi retorted.

“She’s protecting him.” Lan Sizhui explained. “It would destroy Xiao Xingchen if he were to know the truth right then.”

“But who's to say Xue Yang wouldn’t brag about it the moment Xiao Xingchen found out.” Jin Ling sneered.

She went on to tell him that the woman said his name multiple times and wanted to punish Xue Yang for killing countless people. “Oh heaven, he’s out of his mind! He’s been hiding beside us all along, and I don’t even know what he’s trying to do!”

Xiao Xingchen couldn't believe it at all, "But his voice is different. And…"

"It kind of hurts to see this a second time." Wei Wuxian suddenly said, the corners of his lips tugging down. "I hate seeing the painful realization on Xiao Xingchen's face. The betrayal of a friend always hurts."

Lan Wangji glanced at him. "You believe Xue Yang thought of them as friends?"

"Who knows what that guy thinks…" Wei Wuxian shrugged. "But Xiao Xingchen, he probably considered them as something as close to family."

When A-Qing mentioned that Xue Yang only had nine fingers, Xiao Xingchen staggered, almost falling to the ground.

A-Qing immediately helped him to the table, where they both sat down slowly. After a while, Xiao Xingchen asked how A-Qing found out because if it were Xue Yang , he wouldn't have let her touch his hand to discover it.

A-Qing clenched her teeth, "… Daozhang! Let me tell you the truth! I'm not blind. I can see! I didn't touch his hands, but saw them instead!"

Xiao Xingchen was almost at a loss for words, "What did you say? You can see?"

"Oh heavens, will he be able to take all this in? They need to leave quickly!" A junior bit his nails.

She apologized and apologized, "I'm sorry, Daozhang! I didn't lie to you on purpose! I was scared that if you knew that I'm not blind, you'd chase me away! But please don't blame me for now. Let's run away together. He'll be back after he finishes shopping for food!"

Suddenly, the bandages that wrapped around Xiao Xingchen's eyes had two smudges of red seeped from within. The blood grew more and more and eventually leaked through the bandages, trickling down from where his eyes once were.

A-Qing cried out, "Daozhang, you're bleeding!"

"He's crying…" Lan Shizhui corrected softly.

Some of the female cultivators who had just finished shedding tears started tearing up again.

A-Qing helped him wipe some off. Yet, the harder she tried, the more blood there was. Xiao Xingchen raised a hand, "I'm fine… I'm fine."

Xiao Xingchen murmured, "But… But if he really is Xue Yang, why would it be like this? Why didn't he kill me in the beginning, and even stayed by my side for so many years? Why would this be Xue Yang?"

A-Qing burst out, "Of course he wanted to kill you in the beginning! I've seen his eyes before. They were meaner than mean and scarier than scary! But since he was injured and couldn't move, he needed someone to care for him! I didn't know him. If I did and knew that

he was a killing machine, I would've stabbed him to death when he was in the bush! Daozhang, let's run! Alright?"

Yet, in his heart, Wei Wuxian sighed, That'd be impossible. If she didn't tell Xiao Xingchen, he would've continued living like this with Xue Yang. Now that she told Xiao Xingchen, he wouldn't simply run away either. He'd definitely ask Xue Yang directly. There's no solution to this.

As he had expected, after Xiao Xingchen managed to calm down, he told A-Qing, "A-Qing, run away."

A chorus of groans rang in the cave. Despite knowing the end result, many still hoped to see these two emerge free from Xue Yang's shackles.

"Me? Daozhang, let's run away together!"

Xiao Xingchen shook his head, "I can't go. I need to find out what exactly he's trying to do. He definitely has a goal, and tried to reach this goal in the past few years by pretending to be somebody else and staying by my side. If I left him here alone, I'm afraid that the people of Yi City would sink into his hands. Xue Yang has always been this way."

"So chivalrous!" A female cultivator in pink tearily complimented. Most of her companions muttered in agreement, dabbing their wet eyes with handkerchiefs.

A cultivator nearby couldn't help but huff to himself. "Well, he still failed in saving Yi City."

This time, A-Qing's sobs weren't faked anymore. She tossed the bamboo pole to the side and clung to Xiao Xingchen's leg, "Me? Daozhang, how can I go by myself? I wanna stay with you. If you're not leaving, then I'm not leaving either. If worst comes to worst we'll just be murdered by him. I'll be so lonely that I die if I'm roaming outside by myself anyways. I know you don't want this to happen so me, so let's run away together!"

Xiao Xingchen replied, "A-Qing, you can see and you're very clever. I trust that you'll be able to live a good life. You don't know how scary Xue Yang is. You can't stay. You mustn't go near him again, either."

"But she does know! She just can't reveal the truth!" A cultivator frustratingly commented.

Liu Dazhong sighed. "Looks like A-Qing's tactic of gaining sympathy no longer works on Xiao Xingchen. He can't be fooled after she's revealed her sight."

Suddenly, a series of brisk footsteps came from outside.

Xue Yang was back!

Xiao Xingchen looked up in alarm, returning to the level of keenness he had when he night-hunted. He quickly pulled A-Qing over and whispered, "When he comes in, I'll handle him while you use the chance to escape. Listen to me!"

A-Qing was so scared that she could only nod, tears still brimming in her eyes. Xue Yang kicked the door, "What are you guys doing? I'm already back, and you haven't left yet? If you're still in there then open the hatch and let me inside. I'm so tired."

The rogue cultivator narrowed his eyes. "Just from the tone of his voice, you'd think that he was only a boy-next-door or a cheerful shidi. But who'd ever imagine this was villain who had no sense of morality, a demon who wore the facade of a human."

Tang Tang shuddered as she wrapped her arms around herself. "It feels like everything is about to come to climax."

Although the door wasn't locked, it had been bolted from the inside. If they didn't open the door anytime soon, Xue Yang would definitely be suspicious.

A-Qing wiped her face. "How are you tired?! It's only such a small distance from here to the market, and you're already tired?! I'm just a bit slow since I'm seeing which outfit is better. How does it concern you?!"

Xue Yang mocked, "How many outfits do you even have? No matter how much you change, you'll look the same. Come, come, open the door."

Even when A-Qing's legs wobbled, she still spat in a strong voice, "Hmph! I'm not gonna open it for you. Kick however you please."

A cultivator, who had praised A-Qing before, chuckled. "Acting strong till the very last moment. I bet this young lady would have run circles over cultivation society if given the chance."

Xue Yang laughed, "Mark your words. Daozhang, fix the door afterwards. Don't blame it on me."

After he spoke, he immediately kicked the wooden door open. He stepped over the high threshold and walked inside. He held the basket filled with vegetables on one hand, and a crimson apple on the other. Just as he took a bite out of it, he looked down only to see Shuanghua, which sunk into his stomach.

The basket dropped to the ground. The cabbage, carrots, apples, and steam buns rolled onto the floor.

Xiao Xingchen shouted in a low voice, "A-Qing, run!"

Some cultivators cheered at Xiao Xingchen taking first blood while others began to grow more anxious, knowing this wasn't the end.

Moving as fast as she could, A-Qing barged through the door of the coffin home. Immediately afterward, she went on another path and crept back again. She climbed to her usual hiding spot, then popped her head out to watch what was going on inside.

Xiao Xingchen asked coldly, "Was it fun?"

Xue Yang took another bite into the apple that was still in his hand. He only replied after calmly chewing for a while and swallowing the fruit, "Yes. Of course it was fun."

"How is he still eating with his stomach pierced?!" A junior grimaced in disgust.

He used his original voice again.

Xiao Xingchen asked, "Just what do you want to do, having stayed with me for all these years?"

Xue Yang replied, "Who knows? Maybe I'm bored."

Wei Wuxian shook his head instinctively. Although Xue Yang decieved Xiao Xingchen to the point of suicide, his actions when they arrived at Yi City showed a more complex attitude towards Xiao Xingchen than he would like to admit.

Chapter End Notes

My burn out was worst than I thought but seeing all of you still commenting even a year later pushed me to keep adding a little more to this chapter until I could finally release it on my birthday ;w; I'm changing departments in my work soon so I don't know if it will put me even busier than before but I still have motivation to see this fic to the end, even if it takes me months as you can see XD;;

Grasses - VIII (5) - IX

Chapter Notes

I come bearing a long chapter after a long wait

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Xiao Xingchen pulled out Shuanghua and got ready to attack again. Xue Yang told his second-half of his childhood story as he casually wiped the wound on his stomach, suppressing it so that it didn't bleed excessively.

"We're not interested in knowing!" A cultivator shouted uselessly as the screen changed back to the familiar scene of Xue Yang as a child.

In the end, the child went back to the man who had fooled him to send the letter. The man seemed like he had been caught by the brawnier one and had been beaten as well. He had kicked the dirty little child away at once.

After the man climbed up an ox cart and told the cart driver to leave, the child chased after it to get his plate of sugary pastries. Irritated, the man used the driver's whip to lash at his head, and the child fell to the ground. And then, the wheels of the cart ground over the child's hand, one finger at a time.

Many people cringed at the gruesome sound.

"Ah, so that's how…" One male cultivator pointed to his finger and then grimaced.

Xiao Xingchen couldn't see, but Xue Yang raised his left hand at him anyway, "He was seven! The bones of his left hand were crushed, while one finger was ground into battered flesh on the spot! This man was Chang Ping's father."

"Just because of one man, he killed his entire family?!" Jin Ling sputtered in outrage.

"He could have sought revenge by just going after Chang Ping's father! Why did he have to go and kill so many? It's not like those lives were all worth his missing finger," Lan Jingyi said with a look of anger on his face. The other juniors nodded in agreement.

Nie Huaisang peeked from the top of his fan at the numerous cultivators talking about how unreasonable Xue Yang acted just for a slight in his childhood. "The cruelty of one cultivator can lead to the downfall of an entire clan and the deaths of many innocents. It's not an exaggeration to say that it's happened more than once before, and yet nobody is willing to learn their lesson yet. Just about anyone would do anything for vengeance."

“If only everyone can learn to be considerate and polite to others, right Sect Leader? Then we could avoid angering those we shouldn’t,” A cultivator from the Nie clan said.

Nie Huaisang’s lips curled upwards into a wry grin. “Oh, if people were like that, then the world would simply be a more peaceful place.”

Xue Yang went on to say that the Yueyang Chang Clan was only reaping what it had sown.

Xiao Xingchen spokes, “If you sought revenge, you could’ve simply broken one of his fingers as well. Why did you have to kill his entire clan?”

Xue Yang responded, “It was only around fifty something people. How could it have possibly been equal to one of my fingers?”

"I keep saying it but he's sick in the head.” A cultivator thumped his knee in frustration and annoyance. “Does he think himself the king?!"

Xiao Xingchen’s face grew paler and paler from Xue Yang’s confident tone. He shouted, “Then what about others?! Then why did you wipe out Baixue Temple? Why did you blind Daozhang Song ZiChen’s eyes?!”

Xue Yang asked in reply, “Then why did you stop me? Why did you hinder what I wanted to do? Why did you stand up for those dregs of the Chang Clan? You wanted to help Chang Cian? Or Chang Ping? Hahahaha, how did Chang Ping first cry tears of gratitude? And how did he later beg you not to help him? Daozhang Xiao Xingchen, this matter had been your fault, ever since the beginning. You shouldn’t have meddled with the rights and wrongs of other people. Who was right, who was wrong; would an outsider be able to understand? Or, maybe you shouldn’t have even left the mountain in the first place. Your teacher, BaoShan SanRen, was indeed smart. Why didn’t you listen to her and obediently cultivate in the mountains? If you couldn’t understand the happenings of this world, then you shouldn’t have come!”

Many cultivators started standing up in indignation, completely disgusted by the person they were seeing on the screen. After watching the story unfold, a lot of people couldn't help but sympathize with Xiao Xingchen and cursed Xue Yang viciously for his malicious acts.

"A demon in human skin!"

"The worst kind of humanity!"

"The scum of the earth!"

Wei Wuxian just listened where he sat, unable to help feeling like this situation was strangely familiar. But while he sympathized for young Xue Yang who’d been deceived, the Xue Yang who went and killed innocent people just because they got in the way of his goals was someone not worthy of anyone’s sympathy.

It was more than Xiao Xingchen could bear, “… Xue Yang, you really are… too disgusting…”

A killing intent flashed in Xue Yang's eyes and he went on a tirade on why he hated righteous and good people like Xiao Xingchen. "Would I care if anybody thinks I'm disgusting? But, on the other hand, are you in a position to be disgusted by me?"

Xiao Xingchen paused slightly, "What do you mean?"

Lan Sizhui began nervously clutching the skirt of his robes. "He's going to reveal it. He's really going to tell him."

Everyone in the cave could see how the following scenes were going to happen next, but they all felt helpless to prevent it from happening.

"This bastard!" Lan Jingyi shouted, the rim of his eyes turning red. He couldn't even care that he was cursing right now, but none of the Lan cultivators admonished him for they too were completely sucked into this horror story.

In a horrifying reveal of the truth, Xue Yang began to recount all the 'good deeds' he had made Xiao Xingchen do over the years.

"...If not for how I cut off all of their tongues, I bet they would've been wailing and shouting 'Daozhang, spare us'."

Xiao Xingchen's entire body started to tremble. After a long while, he managed, "You deceived me. You wanted to deceive me."

Xue Yang said, "Yes, I deceived you. I've been deceiving you all along. Who would've known that you believed me when I was deceiving you, but now you don't believe me when I'm speaking the truth?"

Xiao Xingchen staggered and swung his sword toward Xue Yang, shouting, "Be quiet! Be quiet!"

Xue Yang looked like a living monster at that moment with a green light in his eyes and sharp canines. He shouted, "Alright! I'll be quiet! If you still don't believe me, then pass a few moves with the one standing behind you. Make him tell you that if I'm deceiving you or not!"

Xiao Xingchen naturally blocked a sword that came swinging at him with Shuanghua. As the two swords clashed, his entire body instantly became a stone statue like a withered human.

Xiao Xingchen asked with utmost cautiousness, "... Is that you, Zichen?"

There was no answer.

At this point, tears were pouring down on almost everybody's faces. Not even Wei Wuxian was immune as he watched this scene all over again. Just as a tear rolled down his cheek when he watched Xiao Xingchen hesitantly trace the characters 'Fuxue' on Song Lan's sword, Wei Wuxian felt a thumb reaching out to catch it.

Wei Wuxian turned to Lan Wangji. Lan Wangji was gazing at him with eyes so gentle but with also a degree of anguish and grief. Wei Wuxian knew Lan Wangji shared some of Xiao

Xingchen's pain of losing somebody so precious. But Lan Wangji hadn't done it with his own hands unknowingly, and that was the heartache both of them felt for this tragedy.

Xiao Xingchen was trembling so much that even his voice sounded as though it was scattered on the ground, "… Zichen… Daozhang Song… Daozhang Song… Is that you…?"

Song Lan looked at him without making a sound.

Two frightening holes had already been soaked through the bandages that was wrapped around Xiao Xingchen's eyes by blood that never seemed to stop seeping. He wanted to reach out and touch the person who held the sword, but he was too afraid, reaching out, then putting his arms back again. Waves of tearing pain rippled through A-Qing's chest. Both Wei Wuxian and she had difficulties breathing. Unable to breathe, tears poured out of her eyes.

Lan Wangji held Wei Wuxian tighter in his embrace as he watched the Wei Wuxian on the screen sobbing his heart out. He wished, like all the times Wei Wuxian had to face difficulties on his own, that he'd been there with him. But without him distracting Xue Yang at that time, Wei Wuxian would not have been able to gather this important information from A-Qing.

Xiao Xingchen stood where he was, at a loss of what to do, "… What happened…? Say something…"

He had completely fallen apart, "Can anybody say something?!"

As he had wished, Xue Yang spoke, "Would I still need to tell you who exactly was the walking corpse that you had killed yesterday?"

A clang.

Shuanghua fell onto the ground.

Xue Yang burst out in laughter.

Xiao Xingchen stood blankly in front of Song Lan. Putting his hands on his head, he wailed as though he was ripping his chest apart.

Many of the Sect Leaders, who were usually a stickler to their own principles, tried hard not to be too affected by these past events, but they were just human and had their own friends and close companions too. They felt such an uncomfortable sense of anguish from Xiao Xingchen's grief that some of them had to use their handkerchiefs to hastily wipe away tears that threatened to spill from the corners of their eyes.

Ouyang Zizhen, who had no regard for giving his Sect Leader face, asked, "Father, are you… crying?"

"Hush, boy, and turn back around! This is just sweat." Sect Leader Ouyang covered his red eyes with a scowl.

Ouyang Zizhen faced forward again with a purse of his lips. Everyone else was crying too, especially him; his father didn't have to act so tough now. And he honestly just wanted to

look away from the screen for a moment because the overwhelming pain he was feeling right now was just too much. Not to mention he could hardly look at A-Qing sobbing as she watched her most beloved Daozhang breaking down in front of her.

Xue Yang laughed so hard that tears formed in the corners of his eyes. He scowled, "What's wrong?! You're so touched to see your old friend again that you're even crying! Do you want to give him a hug?!"

A-Qing covered her mouth as firm as she could, refusing to let out any trace of her whimpered crying. Inside of the coffin home, Xue Yang paced from one side to the other as he cursed with a terrifying tone of both wrath and ecstasy, "Saving the world! What a joke. You can't even save yourself!"

Series of sharp pains stabbed at Wei Wuxian's head. This time, the pain wasn't from A-Qing's soul.

Lan Xichen, who was glassy-eyed, sniffed and said in a slightly rough voice, "Wei Wuxian has stayed inside for too long and is experiencing too many emotions. It was dangerous for you to have continued spectating this."

"I know," Wei Wuxian gave him a weak smile. "But I couldn't just leave, not until I knew what happened to Xiao Xingchen and A-Qing's untimely deaths."

Crestfallen, Xiao Xingchen kneeled on the ground, beside Song Lan's feet. He squeezed himself close, as though he had shrunk into a small, weak lump of something, almost hoping that he'd disappear from this world. His snowy white robes had already been covered in dust and blood. Xue Yang shouted at him, "You couldn't do anything, you've failed miserably, you're the only one to blame—you asked for all of this!"

Lan Wangji looked at Wei Wuxian on the screen staring down at Xiao Xingchen and he knew Wei Wuxian was seeing himself in him. When he thought he had failed his shijie and his clan miserably as he stood drenched in blood, who couldn't do anything except silently acknowledge the critiques and accusations, who was wholly beyond hope, who could only cry in despair…

"You're not him," Lan Wangji whispered into Wei Wuxian's ear. Wei Wuxian shuddered but allowed himself to be held in Lan Wangji's lap just to huddle closer to his husband. Nobody was paying attention to them anyway.

The white bandages had been stained entirely red. Xiao Xingchen's face was covered in blood as he could only bleed to cry.

Xiao Xingchen thought, I've been deceived for years, I took my enemy as a friend, and all of my kindness was stepped over. I thought that I was exorcising ghosts, but my hands were bathed in the blood of the innocent. I even killed my closest friend!

He could only whimper in pain, "Please. Let me go."

Wei Wuxian was surprised to hear Xiao Xingchen's thoughts. It just made the experience even more painful, knowing what he was thinking before he made the move to kill himself.

Xue Yang taunted, "Didn't you want to stab me to death with your sword just a moment ago? Why are you begging me to let you go, now?"

He clearly knew that, with Song Lan's corpse protecting him, Xiao Xingchen wouldn't be able to pick up his sword again.

He won again. It was an overwhelming victory.

Suddenly, Xiao Xingchen snatched up Shuanghua, which had been lying on the ground. Turning the body of the sword, he placed the sharp edge by his neck. The clear radiance of a silver sword glare flashed across Xue Yang's dark, lightless eyes. Xiao Xingchen loosened his hands. Crimson blood trickled down Shuanghua's blade.

Following the limpid echo of the sword tumbling to the ground, both Xue Yang's movement and laughter halted as Xiao Xingchen fell silent forever.

Sharp gasps and whimpers echoed throughout the cave, people putting hands over their mouths as they realized that it wasn't Xue Yang who had taken his life, but Xiao Xingchen himself who ended it with his own hands.

Wei Wuxian closed his eyes and pressed his face into Lan Wangji's shoulder, silently crying again for the loss of a great man and the memories it surged forth from his past.

The juniors, who despite hearing all of this secondhand from Wei Wuxian, were in complete shambles. Lan Sizhui was covering his face with his hands, his shoulders shaking while his back was getting patted on by Wen Ning. Lan Jingyi was shamelessly crying loudly like a child, with some of the juniors crying with him.

Jin Ling was sitting stock still and glaring furiously at the image of Xue Yang on the screen while tears continued dripping down his face. He kept brushing them off his cheeks with his arms until his sleeves were wet and his face was red.

Jiang Cheng sat in silent contemplation, his eyes downcast and entire aura gloomy. He seemed to be recalling something from the past, and his gaze would sometimes stray over to Wei Wuxian.

After a while of silence, he walked to Xiao Xingchen's motionless corpse. He looked down with bloodshot eyes, the twisted curvature of his lips gradually sinking. Wei Wuxian didn't know if he had accidentally saw wrong, but it seemed that the rim of Xue Yang's eyes were brimming a reddish tint.

Immediately afterward, he glowered through clenched teeth, "You forced me to do this!"

He then laughed grimly, and spoke to himself, "A dead one is better! Only dead people listen."

“Don’t tell me…” Tang Tang began with puffy eyes after crying so much, “... he’s going to turn Xiao Xingchen into a fierce corpse?”

“If he does, I’m gonna fucking kill him. I don’t care if he’s already six feet underground, I’m going to dig him out, revive him, then kill him again,” Fei Fei swore with gleaming eyes and face blotchy with tear stains.

“I’m just so,” Ling Bao sniffed, still unable to stop shedding tears. “I’m so sad. We all knew this was coming but it hurts even more knowing Xiao Xingchen ended it all himself. And now Xue Yang is making that face as if he regrets taking it too far but how could he when this was all his fault…!”

“Bao Bao, calm down. He’s not worth getting worked up over,” Li Li soothed him with a pat on his back.

“Hey, do you need an extra handkerchief?”

Li Li looked up at the man who had worked over to their small group and gave him a frown. “Can’t you see we need a moment to ourselves, brother?”

Liu Dazhong raised a brow at her wet sleeves. “Then your friends can borrow it, A-Li.”

“Wait, the guy who kept talking like he memorized an entire book was your brother?!” Fei Fei gasped. Tang Tang elbowed her on the side while smiling awkwardly at Liu Dazhong.

“Can I borrow it?” Ling Bao asked while he stared up at Liu Dazhong with big, watery eyes.

Liu Dazhong blinked before his lips curled up and he handed the handkerchief to Ling Bao. Their fingers brushed together, and Ling Bao blushed slightly as he looked away and began using the handkerchief to dab his face.

Li Li, who was not an idiot, glanced back and forth between her brother and her friend, feeling something strange going on here.

Xue Yang felt for Xiao Xingchen’s breathing and squeezed his wrist. Then he wiped away all of the blood on Xiao Xingchen’s face and even exchanged the old bandages with new ones, carefully wrapping them around him.

He painted an array on the ground and properly placed Xiao Xingchen inside. Afterwards, he cleaned up the entire house and his mood seemed to get better. At last, he took out the piece of candy that Xiao Xingchen gave him last night. Then, he waited for Xiao Xingchen to sit up.

But it never happened. When dusk fell completely, he kicked the table and cursed. After repeated examinations of the array, he felt that there was nothing wrong. After another two hours, Xue Yang put his hand onto Xiao Xingchen’s forehead, closing his eyes for detection. A moment later, his eyes flew open.

“He’s gone.” Lan Xichen already knew.

Lan Qiren shook his head, his eyes looking older than they already were. “No soul would stay after taking their own life like that.”

“What do they mean?” Ling Bao Bao whispered to Liu Dazhong who continued to stay with them even though Li Li grumbled about it.

“I think it means Xiao Xingchen can’t be made into a fierce corpse when he only has a few strands of his fragmented soul left.”

Ling Bao’s eyes widened. “But why did his soul become… “ his voice faltered as he soon realized it.

Liu Dazhong sighed sadly. “Xiao Xingchen can no longer be called back. His soul has completely shattered.”

It seemed that Xue Yang had never expected something like this to happen. On his face, which constantly grinned, an emptiness appeared for the first time. Although it was too late, he pressed his hands against the wound on Xiao Xingchen’s neck.

In the current moment, Wei Wuxian could finally catch a few traces of that ignorant, confused child on Xue Yang’s face.

A woman in a light blue robe sneered, “Now he has the audacity to grieve? Who was the reason why Xiao Xingchen was pushed to the very end?”

“I don’t know why but I’m strangely glad that Xue Yang is not unfeeling at this moment,” Her friend spoke up beside her, looking at Xue Yang’s expression on the screen. “It shows that those years with Xiao Xingchen had at least affected him, and I don’t think he intended to kill him despite taunting him earlier.”

“How are you so sure? I think he didn’t realize he didn’t want Xiao Xingchen dead until he actually died right in front of his eyes.” The woman snorted with her arms crossed. “Gone is that little happy home he used to have and now it’s too late for him to fix it.”

In an instant, Xue Yang stood up suddenly and rampaged around the coffin home. After he calmed down again, he squatted where he had been and called out in a small voice, “Xiao Xingchen.”

He continued, “If you don’t get up, I’ll make your dear friend Song Lan murder people.

“I’ll kill off everyone in the entire Yi City and make them into living corpses. You’ve been living here for such a long time. Is it really okay for you not to care? I’ll strangle that little blind A-Qing and leave her corpse in the fields for wild dogs to gobble her up.”

A-Qing shivered soundlessly.

“I’m not going to feel sad for this little shit. Even now he’s threatening to kill A-Qing and we all know what’s going to happen to her,” Yu Nianzhen remarked after she finally sorted her emotions from Xiao Xingchen’s death.

Having received no reply, Xue Yang suddenly shouted out of rage, "Xiao Xingchen!"

He yanked at Xiao Xingchen's collar and shook it a couple of times as he stared at the lifeless face in his hands. Suddenly, pulling Xiao Xingchen's arm, he lifted him onto his back.

Xue Yang carried the corpse toward the door. As if he had lost his mind, he ranted in a whisper, "Spirit-trapping Pouch, Spirit-trapping Pouch. Right, a Spirit-trapping Pouch. I need a Spirit-trapping Pouch, a Spirit-trapping Pouch, a Spirit-trapping Pouch…"

Everyone else looked somewhat uncomfortable but not surprised at the insane way Xue Yang had become. Though they understood how it all spiraled out, very little people felt any sympathy for this man who had ruined someone as good and innocent as Xiao Xingchen.

Only after he was far away did A-Qing dare to move slightly. She managed to walk a few more steps forward. As her muscles stretched, she walked faster and faster and faster, and started to run. After she ran so far that Yi City was far behind her, she finally let out the cries that she buried within herself, "Daozhang! Daozhang! Aaah, Daozhang!…"

Her heartbreaking cries echoed the weeps of the people who were still unable to let go of Xiao Xingchen's ending. The fact he had died completely with barely a soul left behind showed how much Xue Yang had broken him, and it was pitiful that A-Qing watched it all without being able to do anything to help.

The scenario suddenly changed and turned to somewhere else.

A-Qing was in an unfamiliar town and pretending to be blind again. She asked whoever came toward her if there were any big sects or really powerful people in the area.

Wei Wuxian thought to himself, She's searching for people who can help her seek revenge for Xiao Xingchen.

"The closest to Shudong district would have been Yunmeng but it still would have been too far away for A-Qing to have walked on foot." Wei Wuxian commented. He managed to extract himself from Lan Wangji's shoulder and was looking at the screen again.

Jiang Cheng's jaw tensed at that. Yu Nianzhen glanced sideways and knew her cousin probably felt as if he could have done something had he known about it.

Unfortunately, nobody took her questions seriously, but A-Qing wasn't discouraged. She tirelessly asked, even if she had been shooed away all those times. Seeing that she couldn't get any answers here, she left and went on a smaller path.

Her stomach growled, and she took a small, white money pouch out of her lapel. She then dug out a small candy from within it, and licked it carefully. After the tip of her tongue tasted the sweetness, she put the candy back again. This was the last piece of candy Xiao Xingchen gave her.

A-Qing packed the pouch away again. With a glance, she suddenly found that another person's shadow appeared within the reflection of the water.

Standing in the reflection, Xue Yang was smiling at her.

With a startled scream, A-Qing immediately scrambled away.

"Gods, I just want to look away. I can't bear it anymore. I think I'm going to die of heartache at this rate," Ouyang Zizhen commented with a pale look on his face.

"If you can't handle it, don't force yourself." Lan Sizhui gently advised him. Even he was feeling squeamish himself. He didn't know how Senior Wei had handled seeing it all the first time.

But Ouyang Zizhen shook his head. "No, I owe it to A-Qing. She sacrificed herself for us, and her pain was definitely much worse than what we're feeling now."

Xue Yang had been standing behind her. He spoke happily, "A-Qing, why are you running away? We haven't seen each other in such a long time. Don't you miss me?"

A-Qing shrieked for someone to help her, but this was already an obscure mountain path. Nobody would come to help her.

Xue Yang raised a brow, "I just happened to have ran into you when you were asking around in the city after I finished my business in Yueyang. What a wonderful turn of fate. Speaking of it, your acting is superb. You even fooled me for such a long time. Well done."

A-Qing knew that there was no chance of escaping death this time. After the shock, thinking to herself that she'd die anyway, why couldn't she die after cursing all she wanted? Becoming bolder again, she spat out whatever profanities that came to her mind. Xue Yang only grinned and listened.

A-Qing continued, "You piece of shit! Dream on! You don't deserve to call Daozhang unclean. You're just a pool of spittle! Daozhang must be the unluckiest man in the world to have met you!"

Xue Yang's expression finally darkened. He spoke in a cold tone, "Since you like pretending to be blind so much, why don't you become truly blind?"

With a wave of his hand, some sort of powder came at her face and went into her eyes. A-Qing let out a blood-curdling screech. Xue Yang's voice came again, "You're too talkative. You won't need your tongue anymore, either."

Ouyang Zizhen's eyes reddened, feeling aggrieved and distressed for A-Qing, but he continued to keep watching. The rest of the juniors felt even worse as this was someone they had met at Yi City and someone who had risked her soul to try and save them from the maniac Xue Yang. It hit harder knowing the kind of suffering she had experienced.

Meanwhile, many female cultivators cringed at the awful treatment to the woman and some had long since stopped looking due to how cruel Xue Yang's torture was to someone so helpless.

The crisp rings of the silver bell sounded but Wei Wuxian was still immersed in A-Qing's emotions. His ghost looked to be in pain.

Lan Wangji clenched his jaw, worried for Wei Wuxian. Even though he knew this would be the outcome, Wei Wuxian still went through with the Empathy. Wei Wuxian always felt so much for the downtrodden, and it came with having such a pure heart.

Lan Wangji couldn't stop feeling adoration and distress over that aspect of Wei Wuxian.

Lan Jingyi waved a hand in front of him, "There is no reaction? What if he's turned into a fool?!"

Jin Ling said, "I said already that Empathy is very dangerous!"

Lan Jingyi replied, "Well it was because your head was up in the clouds and did not ring the bell in time."

Jin Ling's face froze, "I…"

"Ah, so this was the kind of conversation happening back then," Wei Wuxian wryly said, thankful for the changing scenery as they no longer had to watch A-Qing's death.

"Next time, do not argue." Lan Wangji sternly told them. The juniors were cowed by Hanguang-Jun's lecture and bowed their heads in apology.

Luckily, Wei Wuxian had finally come to. He stood up against the coffin and the boys swarmed around him as though they were a litter of piglets, talking at the same time, "He's up, he's up!"

"Whew, he hasn't turned into a fool."

"Hasn't he always been a fool to begin with?"

"Don't talk nonsense!"

Wei Wuxian pouted. "Why do they all keep saying I'm a fool? I was a perfectly smart and great senior at that time, right?"

The juniors nodded their heads quickly, seeing the glance Lan Wangji threw at them over Wei Wuxian's head.

With loud chatters surrounding his ears, Wei Wuxian spoke up, "Don't be so loud. My head feels awful."

They quieted at once. Wei Wuxian checked Xiao Xingchen's neck and found the thin yet fatal wound. Wei Wuxian sighed in silence and turned to A-Qing, "Thanks for all the trouble."

"She'd been hiding within the fog of Yi City, stealthily going against Xue Yang by scaring away the humans who had entered the city and warning them, directing them outside," Wei

Wuxian spoke loudly so that the rest of the cultivators could hear it. He had gotten out of Lan Wangji's lap at that point, already feeling much better.

Lan Xichen shook his head in awe. "She is one courageous and dedicated girl."

Wei Wuxian smiled. "Yeah, she was great."

A-Qing put her palms together and saluted Wei Wuxian a couple of times. Then, using her bamboo pole as a sword, she made the "kill, kill, kill" gestures.

Wei Wuxian replied, "Don't worry." He turned to the disciples, "Stay here, all of you. The walking corpses in the city won't be able to come here. I'll be back soon."

Lan Jingyi couldn't help but ask, "Just what did you see during Empathy?"

Wei Wuxian said, "It's too long of a story. I'll tell you later."

Jin Ling replied, "Can't you sum it up? Don't leave us at a cliffhanger!"

"He really left us at a cliffhanger." Jin Ling huffed, though he didn't really mean it.

"You think he really could have summed all that in just a few sentences?!" A junior who wasn't part of the Yi City group said incredulously.

Wei Wuxian said, "In summary: Xue Yang must die."

The junior tilted his head in consideration. "Or yeah, he could just say that."

The knocks of A-Qing's pole led the way for him. The two moved rapidly and immediately returned to where the fight happened.

Lan Wangji and Xue Yang had already went outside. The sword glares of Bichen and Jiangzai clashed—the fight was at a critical moment.

"The fog." Lan Xichen said worriedly. Unlike Xue Yang who was familiar with the place, Wangji had a difficult time seeing. He was even playing his guqin to ward off the walking corpses.

Lan Qiren didn't look too concerned, confident in his nephew's skills. He was right here in this cave anyway, while his opponent had already become a cold corpse.

Just as Wei Wuxian was about to take out his flute, two black figures slammed in front of him. Wen Ning was pressing Song Lan onto the ground, both corpses holding each other's necks with their hands.

Wei Wuxian commanded, "Hold him down!"

He bent down and quickly found the ends of the two nails that went through Song Lan's head. He immediately pinched the two ends and started to slowly pull the nails out.

Song Lan widened his eyes and growled in a low voice. When the nails had been pulled out, he collapsed on the ground and ceased to move.

“Oh, he removed them! Does that mean Song Lan will be like the Ghost General?”

“But we haven’t heard any sightings of another fierce corpse like the Ghost General around?”

“I kind of wish he could find his own peace too. I mean, imagine waking up and knowing your best friend killed himself after he found out about killing you.”

The group of cultivators frowned at the thought and suddenly didn’t know how to feel about Song Lan’s return.

Suddenly, a furious roar came from where the other two fought, “Give it back!”

Chapter End Notes

I am just incredibly happy that this not only ended Grasses VIII but also IX hahaha that whole yin arc backstory was too long my god WE’RE FINALLY OUT OF THERE LADIES AND GENTLEMEN!!!

Also in chapter 17, Li Li introduced herself as Liu Jiali to the group but it seems no one caught the connection between her and Liu Dazhong (which was perfect for this reveal hahaha) Tho some of you were already shipping him with Ling Bao when I only threw scraps of them interacting, you guys just had your gaydars ready XD

Grasses - X (1)

Chapter Notes

A Christmas update to all! 🎁

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lan Wangji's sword had slashed across Xue Yang's chest and Bichen's tip had taken the Spirit-trapping Pouch hidden in his lapels as well. Wei Wuxian asked Xue Yang if he could return Shuanghua since he didn't own it. He even taunted that he wouldn't be able to piece together Xiao Xingchen's soul, no matter what. "He was so disgusted by you, yet you still want to bring him back to play games."

"Is it just me or does anyone else feel relieved seeing Hanguang-Jun again?" A cultivator from another sect whispered to his fellow disciple.

"No, I feel the same way. It's like a savior has finally come to end that monster's life."

Abruptly, Xue Yang shouted, "Who wants to play games with him?!"

Wei Wuxian asked, "Then why did you kneel and beg me so that I can help you mend his soul?"

Xue Yang said cruelly,. "Why did I do so? Hah! How can you not know? I want to make him into a fierce corpse, an evil spirit, so that I can control him! Didn't he want to be a virtuous person? Then, I'll make it so that he never stops killing, so that he'll never be at peace!"

Wei Wuxian replied, "Hmm? You hate him that much? Then why did you kill Chang Ping?"

Xue Yang sneered, "Why did I kill Chang Ping? Did you really need to ask, Patriarch Yiling?! Haven't I told you? I said that I was going to wipe out the entire Yueyang Chang Clan, so I won't even leave a dog behind!"

The juniors winced whenever Hanguang-Jun's blade pierced Xue Yang, and Xue Yang didn't even stop or fall down.

"Why does he have such a high tolerance for pain? It's creepy," asked one of them.

"I think it comes with the craziness," his friend replied.

"I was wondering why you were asking so many questions, Wei Wuxian." The rogue cultivator suddenly spoke up. "Turns out you were diverting Xue Yang's attention and making him make so much noise for your Hanguang-Jun to attack him," said the rogue cultivator.

Wei Wuxian shrugged with a little prideful smirk. “Hanguang-Jun just knows my plan perfectly.”

Wei Wuxian continued, "That's a great reason you came up with. Unfortunately, the years don't add up. Someone like you who seeks revenge for the smallest things and murders in such ruthless ways wouldn't have waited so many years to finish off one clan, would you? You know the reason why you killed Chang Ping?”

Xue Yang shouted, "Then, tell me. What do I know? What do I know?!"

Wei Wuxian asked again, "You didn't just kill him. Why did you choose to use lingchi, the torture that represents 'punishment'? If you were avenging for yourself, why did you use Shuanghua, instead of your own Jiangzai? Why did you dig out his eyes and make it so that he was just like Xiao Xingchen?"

Xue Yang shouted himself hoarse, "Nonsense! That's all nonsense! It's revenge—why in the world would I have let him die comfortably?"

Wei Wuxian said, "You were indeed seeking revenge, but whose revenge were you actually seeking? What a joke. If you wanted to seek revenge, the one you should've executed lingchi on is yourself!"

“Wait, what? Xue Yang was blaming Xiao Xingchen’s death on Chang Ping?” Tang Tang asked, looking confused.

“But that doesn’t make sense.” Fei Fei scratched her head. “How in the world is it Chang Ping’s fault?”

Ling Bao tilted his head. “Was it because Chang Ping’s case started this whole thing?”

“This is just my opinion. Maybe it’s Xue Yang’s messed up way of relieving his guilt and obsession to get Xiao Xingchen back.” Liu Dazhong contemplated.

With two whooshes, the sharp noises of something slicing the air came right at him. Wei Wuxian didn't even flinch. Wen Ning darted in front of him and intercepted two nails that shone a cruel, black light.

The juniors chorused in *ooh* s and *aah* s.

“That was so cool,” Jingyi whispered in awe. “Senior Wei somehow knew the Ghost General would save him.”

Shizhui nodded, his eyes sparkling with pride. “Of course, the Ghost General is amazing.”

If Wen Ning could blush, he would be doing it right now.

Xue Yang let off a series of horrifying laughter. He ceased to pay heed to Wei Wuxian and went back to fighting with Lan Wangji amid the fog.

Wei Wuxian thought in silence, The little delinquent has got such a high vitality. It's as if he can't feel pain at all and will be fine no matter where he's injured. If only there was a way to find his location.

Suddenly, a series of crisp knocks came from within the fog. Thinking quick, Wei Wuxian shouted, "Lan Zhan, attack where the pole knocks!"

Lan Wangji lunged at once. Xue Yang let out a suppressed moan. A moment later, the bamboo pole sounded again, at a place a few meters away!

“What a smart girl.” Lan Xichen curled his lips, realizing just as fast what was going on.

“That’s A-Qing! She’s following Xue Yang and revealing his location!” An excited junior said.

“She’s a fearless one, that girl,” Yu Nianzhen said, impressed.

“But isn’t she getting too close?” A cultivator of the Yu sect asked nervously.

Jiang Cheng spoke solemnly, “She’s taking a high risk.”

Lan Wangji continued to attack where the noise came from. Xue Yang threatened, "Little Blind, aren't you scared that I'll break you into pieces, following me around like that?"

Xue Yang's movements were extremely quick. He immediately appeared somewhere else but A-Qing stuck to him like a second shadow. She knocked her pole on the ground as quickly as she could. As soon as they sounded, Bichen's sword glare followed immediately!

“You’ve got this, A-Qing!”

“You’re amazing, A-Qing!”

“A-Qing, you’re the best!”

Despite the juniors’ cheers, tears started filling their eyes as they saw the growing frustration on Xue Yang’s face. They knew what was coming.

In the beginning, Xue Yang moved through the fog as though a fish amid water. He could both hide and sneak attacks however he wanted to. Yet, now, he had to spare attention to deal with A-Qing. With a curse, he quickly threw a talisman behind him. Immediately after the split second of distraction, following A-Qing's bone-chilling screech, Bichen pierced through his chest!

“ *No!* ”

Many looked distraught as A-Qing’s ghost form disintegrated.

“It wasn’t enough that he killed her the first time.” A male cultivator smacked his knee harshly. His senior sister sitting beside him suddenly blew her nose on a dainty handkerchief.

“That poor girl went through so much,” she said with red eyes. “Until the end, she went down getting vengeance for Xiao Xingchen.”

“A-Qing!” Wei Wuxian tossed out a Spirit-trapping Pouch for it to save A-Qing's soul.

“Oh yes!” Several cultivators, especially the juniors who weren’t there, breathed sighs of reliefs.

“Hopefully, Wei Wuxian was fast enough.”

“He’s really kind to have saved her.”

“I told you the Yiling Patriarch wasn’t all bad!”

From amid the fog came the noises of someone coughing up blood.

With heavy steps, Xue Yang walked for a while, then suddenly launched forward. With his hands extended, he roared, "Give it back!"

Bichen's blue light split through the air. Lan Wangji cleanly severed off one of his arms.

“Oh gods!” Tang Tang looked away at the gruesome scene.

“Surely, he has no way to escape now, right?” Ling Bao asked, worried that Xue Yang might find a chance to escape again.

“I hope so! He’s done enough damage to our society!” Fei Fei strongly stated.

Liu Dazhong nodded. “With the wounds inflicted on him by Hanguang-Jun, they are certainly fatal. He won’t survive for long.”

Blood spurted out at once. In front of Wei Wuxian, a large area of white fog had been stained red. He concentrated on solely searching and absorbing the soul of A-Qing that had been scattered.

Meanwhile, Lan Wangji stood in front of Xue Yang as Xue Yang dropped to his knees. It seemed that he had lost so much blood that he finally collapsed, unable to walk any further.

Lan Wangji summoned Bichen again.

Many cultivators felt a mixture of relief and vindication the moment Hanguang-Jun was about to deal the death blow. But they were caught by surprise when blue flames shot from the fog-covered earth to the sky. They knew it instantly. It was fire from a transportation talisman!

“No way!!!”

“You’re kidding me?!”

“This scumbag is gonna get away???”

“This isn’t fair! Who the fuck is saving him?” Many people were incensed and furious at whoever Xue Yang’s savior was.

Wei Wuxian rushed over. Immediately afterward, he had almost slipped on the ground. Where the bloody scent was strongest, the ground was covered in wet, still-fresh blood, all from Xue Yang's severed arm.

However, Xue Yang was gone.

People groaned and shouted in irritation.

“Wait, so does that mean Xue Yang is still alive out there?”

“How do we know he’s actually dead?”

“Who confirmed Xue Yang’s death anyway?”

“Wasn’t it Hanguang-Jun?”

People started turning to Lan Wangji with confused and curious eyes. Lan Wangji remained straight back as he said in a final tone, “He’s dead.”

“Judging from the amount of blood and that Bichen had struck Xue Yang’s most vital parts, he is definitely not going to survive,” Lan Xichen said to support his brother.

Mollified by the words and the evidence in front of them, the cultivators settled back down.

Lan Wangji walked over. Wei Wuxian asked, "The gravedigger?"

Lan Wangji nodded slightly, "I gave the gravedigger three blows. As he was close to being captured, a group of walking corpses attacked and allowed him the opportunity to escape."

Wei Wuxian spoke with a serious expression, "Although he was injured, the gravedigger still brought away Xue Yang's corpse, even though it cost him extensive spiritual powers. He probably knew who Xue Yang was and what he could do. Bringing away Xue Yang's corpse… was to search if he carried the Stygian Tiger Seal with him."

“Su She was annoying for this,” Wei Wuxian grumbled, crossing his arms. “Always following us and disrupting our plans.”

“Mm,” Lan Wangji agreed, having found Su She a headache to deal with.

“That’s right.” Lan Wangji continued. “Xue Yang relied on a restored version of the Stygian Tiger Seal. It’s the only way he was able to control so many corpses.”

“So the gravedigger taking away his body is essentially the same as taking the seal.”

“You let someone like this escape with the seal?!” A sect leader said, aghast.

Wei Wuxian secretly rolled his eyes. “He’s already been dealt with. You’ll see.”

Wei Wuxian's voice was stern, "Now that the situation is already like this, we can only hope that there's a limit to the powers of the Tiger Seal that Xue Yang restored."

Suddenly, with a light toss, Lan Wangji passed something to him.

Wei Wuxian caught it perfectly, "What is it?"

Lan Wangji said, "The right hand."

He had tossed over a new Qiankun Pouch. Having finally remembered why they had came to Yi City in the first place, Wei Wuxian brightened up, "The right hand of our dear friend?"

Lan Wangji hummed, "Mnn."

Nie Huaisang's mouth twitched. It wouldn't stop amusing him that they were calling his brother's corpse 'dear friend.'

"Hanguang-Jun is amazing as always!" Wei Wuxian hugged his husband's arm and snuggled it.

Wei Wuxian instantly praised him, "I expected no less from Hanguang-Jun! Only you would find the time to locate our friend's right hand despite everything! You never fail to impress~ Now, we're one step ahead of them again. What a pity that it's not the head. I wanted to see what our dear friend looks like. Well, I guess it'd happen soon enough… Where's Song Lan?"

With the fog now thinning, Wei Wuxian suddenly noticed that Song Lan was gone. At where he had originally lay, only Wen Ning still squatted on the ground, staring at them blankly.

"Oh right! He should have woken up without the nails in his head, right?"

"Oh gods, then he's gotta be by Xiao Xingchen's corpse."

"It's such a pity. Two amazing cultivators, toyed and destroyed by that bastard Xue Yang."

"I hope they can find peace together one day,"

A lot of cultivaotrs were sympathetic for Song Lan, while others couldn't help but notice that there was another conscious fierce corpse out there.

"So he's just like the Ghost General right?"

"I wonder if he would also follow the Yiling Patriarch's orders…"

Lan Wangji put his hand back to Bichen, which he had already unsheathed. Wei Wuxian stopped him, "It's fine. There's no need to be alarmed. Song Lan, or the fierce corpse back there, probably don't have killing intentions anymore, or else Wen Ning would've alerted us. It's likely that he regained consciousness and left on his own."

He whistled lightly. Wen Ning stood up and proceeded to leave, his figure disappearing into the fog.

Lan Wangji didn't say anything more. He calmly turned to Wei Wuxian, "Let us go."

Just as they were about to leave, suddenly, Wei Wuxian stopped, "Wait."

He saw something lying alone in the blood.

It was a severed left arm. Four of the fingers were closed tightly. The little finger was missing.

“Why is it clenched like that? What was he holding?”

A sect leader opened his eyes wide. “Could it have been the Stygian Tyger Seal?”

A soon as he said that, other people couldn’t help but stare at the screen with bated breath. But even if it was, it would just return to the hands of Wei Wuxian.

The fist of the arm was firmly clenched. Wei Wuxian squatted down. Only by using most of his strength did he succeed in prying the fingers open one by one. After the fist had been opened, he found that it held a small piece of candy.

The piece of candy was tinted slightly black. It was definitely not edible anymore.

It had been clenched so tightly that it was almost crushed.

“Wait, is that—?”

“Oh gods,” Tang Tang quickly looked up and Fei Fei, seeing her eyes grow moist, snapped at her, “Don’t you dare, Tang Tang. Don’t you cry for someone like that!”

“I’m trying not to!” She said, snatching a fan from her sleeve and fanning her face. “But that candy… he’s been holding it ever since Xiao Xingchen—” She choked up, unable to finish her sentence.

“I can’t believe he’s been holding onto the last candy Xiao Xingchen had ever given him,” Ling Bao continued for her, shaking his head sadly.

“He was a broken boy who knew nothing of love and affection,” Li Li started with a sigh. “And when he met Xiao Xingchen again, who didn’t know about his identity and only treated him with care and respect… it must have hurt him to finally realize what he was missing until it was too late,” she ended while wiping a single tear under her eye.

Fei Fei huffed and crossed her arms. “Well, he had a sick way of showing it. Him having a tragic past doesn’t excuse his actions.”

“Xue Yang was definitely evil. But it’s not bad to understand how he became one so that we may help others and prevent them from turning into worst versions of themselves too.” Liu Dazhong solemnly said.

“You sound like our old master,” Li Li couldn’t help but tease in order to lighten the atmosphere.

Liu Dazhong raised an eyebrow. “I take that as a compliment.”

“I think you sounded very wise,” Ling Bao added, and Li Li marveled as her brother’s ears turned red.

Chapter End Notes

Have a Happy Holiday~ ❤️

Grasses - X (2)

Chapter Notes

Belated Happy Birthday Lan Wangji!!!

And thanks so much to Lan for the support! Here's an update for you~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji returned to the coffin home together. The doors were open and Song Lan was standing beside the coffin that Xiao Xingchen lay in, looking inside with his head hanging low.

All of the junior disciples unsheathed their swords.

"Everyone be careful!"

"It's the fierce corpse!"

"It seems to be acting differently," Lan Sizhui noticed.

"Why can't you act calmer and think more?" Jiang Cheng demanded as he saw Jin Ling panicking along with the other juniors. Only that one Lan disciple figured out the situation instantly.

Jin Ling pursed his lips in annoyance and embarrassment. "H-he was trying to kill us a moment ago! Of course, I still had to be cautious."

Wei Wuxian walked into the coffin home and introduced to Lan Wangji, "This is Song Lan, Daozhang Song Zichen."

Standing by the coffin, Song Lan raised his head and turned to them. Lifting the hem of his robes, Lan Wangji stepped over the high threshold elegantly, then nodded.

Song Lan's pair of clear, black eyes stared back at them. Amid the eyes that had originally been Xiao Xingchen's, a deep, indescribable sorrow brimmed. Wei Wuxian knew already. During the period that Xue Yang made him into a fierce corpse and commanded him, he saw and remembered everything.

"That is so sad." A female cultivator, who'd been shedding tears since Xiao Xingchen's death, started getting misty-eyed again. "He watched his dear friend's own suicide, and Song Lan must blame himself for being so helpless to stop it."

“Imagine if Song Lan had never showed up at Yi City,” her friend contemplated. “Daozhang Xiao and A-Qing might have been stuck with that conniving bastard their whole lives and never knew the wrong he had done them.”

Liu Dazhong heard this and shook his head. “Song Lan would have found Xiao Xingchen eventually. Fate brought them all together.”

Li Li pouted discontently. "If only it didn't end in such a tragedy for everybody involved."

After a moment of silence, Wei Wuxian took out two Spirit-trapping Pouches of the same small size. He handed them to Song Lan. "Daozhang Xiao Xingchen and Maiden A-Qing. They’re both very weak. I did what I could."

With shaking hands, Song Lan took them over and rested them on top of his palm.

Wei Wuxian asked, "Daozhang Song, what do you intend to do with Daozhang Xiao Xingchen's corpse?"

With one hand carefully cupping the two pouches, Song Lan pulled out his sword with his other hand and wrote two lines on the ground. "Cremate the corpse. Look after the soul."

Wei Wuxian nodded, "That’s good. If you keep the soul pure and slowly nurse it, then maybe one day it will be whole again.”

Some people were surprised by this revelation, especially the younger ones.

“Is that true?”

“I’ve never heard scattered souls being able to be whole again.”

“Master, is it truly possible for Daozhang Xiao to live again?”

A sect leader sighed to the point his beard shook. “Only time can tell.”

“What do you intend on doing afterwards?"

Song Lan wrote. "Roam this world with Shuanghua. Exorcise evil beings alongside Xingchen." After a pause, he continued, "When he wakes up, tell him I’m sorry, and that it wasn't his fault."

“Oh my gods…”

“What? Why are you crying again?”

Tang Tang sniffled as she responded to Fei Fei, “That’s probably what Daozhang Song couldn’t tell Daozhang Xiao before he died.”

“Stop. You’re going to make me cry again,” Ling Bao insisted. Liu Dazhong looked as if he were ready to give out another handkerchief.

The fog of Yi City was gradually melting away. Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian led the group of disciples out of the deserted city. In front of the city gates, Song Lan parted with them.

He still wore the dark cultivation robes. Standing alone, he carried two swords, Shuanghua and Fuxue, and brought two souls, Xiao Xingchen and A-Qing, as he walked another path, away from Yi City.

“Finally, let them be free,” Lan Xichen murmured, breathing a sigh of relief. Wei Wuxian nodded in agreement while Lan Wangji glanced at his brother’s profile, his expression unreadable.

Lan Sizhui stared at his leaving figure. "'Xiao Xingchen, the bright moon, the gentle breeze; Song Zichen, the distant snow, the bitter frost… I wonder if the two of them would be able to meet each other again."

“I wish they would,” A junior sister whispered with clasped hands.

“Yes, let’s pray they will meet again someday.” Her friend copied her movements and pleaded for their souls.

Wei Wuxian walked over the road covered in weeds. Suddenly, he saw a patch of grass and thought to himself, Back then, this was where Xiao Xingchen and A-Qing took Xue Yang back.

Lan Jingyi asked, "Can you tell us what you saw during the Empathy now? Why would Xue Yang impersonate Xiao Xingchen?"

The other juniors began clamoring as well. "And, was that the Ghost General? Where did the Ghost General go? Why do we not see him anymore? Is he still in Yi City? Why did he appear so suddenly?"

“Wow, I looked so foolish back then.” A junior giggled at his appearance.

“You’re not the only one. I should have pieced together that it was Senior Wei with us! Who else could control the Ghost General?”

"How could any of us have known that? We were only babies when the battle against the Yiling Patriarch happened."

“Gods, I look so dirty after fighting the fierce corpses.” A disciple, who was concerned about his appearance, began bemoaning. “I need to bring extra robes with me next time.”

“Fighting? Did you even do anything other than hide?” Ouyang Zizhen questioned teasingly.

“Hey!"

Wei Wuxian said, "Well, this is a very complicated story…"

As they walked, he finished telling the story, and everyone was so depressed that nobody still remembered the Ghost General.

Lan Jingyi was the first one to cry, "Why would something like this exist?!"

Jin Ling raged, "That Xue Yang is such a filthy scumbag! Death was letting him off too lightly! If Fairy were here, I would've made her chomp him to death!"

Wei Wuxian was terrified. If Fairy had been here, before Xue Yang died, he himself would've been scared to death.

Lan Wangji shook his head with a tiny smile. “I’m here.”

Wei Wuxian laughed and scratched his head. “I know! I don’t need to be scared of dogs as long as Lan Zhan is with me.”

The boy who had complimented A-Qing through the door slit stomped his feet, "Maiden A-Qing, oh, Maiden A-Qing!"

“You really reacted the strongest, Zizhen.” One of the juniors laughed.

Ouyang Zizhen, not even embarrassed by his dramatics despite his father’s pointed glare, said, “But Jingyi cried the loudest.”

“No way it was me!”

“We can hear it right now, idiot.” Jin Ling rolled his eyes and gestured to the cry that was resonating throughout the cave. Lan Qiren looked like he was seconds away from casting a silencing spell on him despite the fact the sound was coming from the mysterious screen. Lan Jingyi bowed his head sheepishly.

“Fortunately, Hanguang-Jun didn’t silence you.” Lan Sizhui said, though his expression said otherwise.

Lan Jingyi suggested through snot and tears, "We should go burn some paper money for Daozhang Xiao Xingchen and Maiden A-Qing. There is a village in front of the road fork over there, right? Let us buy some things and pray for them."

Everyone agreed, "Sure, sure!"

As they talked, they arrived at the village. Lan Jingyi and Lan Sizhui impatiently scurried inside and carried out a few random incense sticks, candles, and paper money. Walking over to the side, they built something that resembled a stove using bricks and rocks. The boys then squatted around it and started to burn paper money, muttering as they fanned the fire.

“You children–” An older cultivator in the Lan sect couldn’t hold back from commenting. “It’s disrespectful to burn money in front of other people’s houses.”

The juniors immediately chorused their apologies and said they knew not to do it anymore.

Lan Xichen came to their rescue. “They were all distraught and just wanted to pay their respects. Besides, Wangji is there to teach them.”

Wei Wuxian turned to Lan Wangji, "Hanguang-Jun, look at what they're doing right in front of other people's doors. You're not even stopping them."

Lan Wangji replied in an indifferent tone, "You can stop them."

Wei Wuxian said, "Fine. I'll discipline them for you."

Lan Xichen, "..."

Lan Wangji didn't even have the grace to look ashamed for making his brother lose face. It didn't help that Wei Wuxian was trying to muffle his laughter against Lan Wangji's shoulder.

Wei Wuxian went over to them. "Am I seeing things? All of you are disciples of prominent sects. Your parents and relatives must've taught you that dead people can't receive paper money, right? Why would dead people want money? They can't receive those. And, you're in front of somebody's doors. If you burn them here…"

Lan Jingyi waved at him, "Shoo, shoo. You are blocking the wind. It will not be able to burn anymore. And it is not like you have died, so how do you know that dead people do not receive paper money?"

"Wow, Jingyi." Ouyang Zizhen clapped in amazement. "You always just know the right words to say."

Lan Jingyi's ears turned red, feeling a sense of fear and deja vu. "Be quiet. How was I supposed to know that was a sore topic?"

With a face covered in tears and ashes, another boy turned to him and agreed, "That's right. How do you know? What if they can actually receive them?"

Ouyang Zizhen blinked in surprise at his past self before suddenly paling. "Oh no, why did I agree with Jingyi?"

"Why are you acting like that's a bad thing!?"

"Because I don't want to get punished with you!"

Sect Leader Ouyang snapped at his son. "If you keep talking and disturbing everyone, you will."

Wei Wuxian murmured, "How do I know?"

Of course, he knew!

During the ten-or-so years when he had been dead, he hadn't even received one single piece of paper money!

Lan Jingyi stabbed another knife into his heart, "Even if you could not receive them, it was probably because nobody burned them for you."

The juniors gasped and looked at Lan Jingyi as if they were seeing someone being sent to their own execution.

Lan Jingyi hung his head and waited for the scolding.

Wei Wuxian snorted with an amused shake of his head. “Raise your head, Jingyi. I’m not mad. You didn’t know I was someone who came back to life.”

Wei Wuxian asked himself in silence, 'How come? Was I really that much of a failure? Was there not a single person who burned paper money for me? Was it really because nobody burned them that I didn't receive any?'

The more he thought about it, the more he felt that it was impossible. He turned around and whispered to Lan Wangji, "Hanguang-Jun, have you burnt paper money for me? At least you've burnt paper money for me, right?"

Lan Wangji glanced at him. He looked down, dusting away the ashes that stuck to the bottom of his sleeve, then stared quietly into the distance, giving not a single word in reply.

Looking at his calm face, Wei Wuxian thought to himself, 'Really? Had he really not burnt anything?!'

Lan Xichen sighed at his brother. He definitely did more than just burn paper money.

Wei Wuxian puffed his cheeks in annoyance and poked the stiff-as-a-rock Hanguang-Jun beside him. “You did many other things instead. I know already, but why didn’t you say so?”

“It was all in the past.” Lan Wangji stated, then he turned to Wei Wuxian with a tender look in his eyes. “And you’re here now. We don’t need to mention them anymore.”

Wei Wuxian’s mild discontent was swept away by his words and he smiled like a silly fool in love.

Meanwhile, the juniors were confused.

"Wait, Hanguang-Jun didn't burn paper money for Senior Wei?"

"So, does this mean burning paper money doesn't work?"

"What did Hanguang-Jun do then?"

Lan Sizhui seemed to recall something from his childhood and told his fellow junior disciples. "It will probably be revealed later. Let's just keep watching."

Suddenly, a villager walked over with a bow on his back. He seemed rather annoyed, "Why are you burning these here? It's in front of my house. How ominous!"

All of them apologized. Lan Sizhui hurried to wipe his face and asked the man if he owned the house.

The villager replied that three generations of his family lived there and no one else. But Lan Sizhui and Lan Jingyi brought up the hunter they met here and who gave them directions toward Yi City. The villager didn't believe them and said they were seeing ghosts. He spat a couple of times, venting out his anger, then shook his head and turned around to leave. The boys were left staring at one another. Lan Jingyi was still protesting, "But he really was sitting in this yard. I remember really clearly that…"

Wei Wuxian said a few things to Lan Wangji. He then turned around, "You understand now? Somebody led you to Yi City. The hunter who directed you there wasn't a villager here at all. He was disguised by someone with ill intentions."

Jin Ling asked, "Was it that somebody had been leading us here ever since the corpses of the cats? Was the fake hunter the one who did all those things?"

Wei Wuxian said, "Most likely so."

"It was Jin Guangyao who did all of this right? Or at least somebody working for him." A junior asked as he wasn't sure until now who led them all to Yi City.

Lan Jingyi nodded. "Definitely. Probably that Su She guy in disguise who tried to get us all killed at the Burial Mounds."

However, Lan Sizhui had a different thought. "But wait, wasn't there still that person who placed the corpse's hand in the Mo Mansion? Could they be the same person?"

"Oh, I almost forgot about that!" Jin Ling said while thumping his palm with a fist. "Disgusting that he used dead cats though."

"It seems like he's the type who enjoys working behind the scenes..." Lan Sizhui contemplated.

As Wei Wuxian listened to the juniors' musings, he swept a glance over to Nie Huaisang who seemed unconcerned. Does he really not care that the people are going to view him differently after finding out how many pawns he used in other to enact his revenge? Or does he have a plan in mind to turn the attention away from him?

Lan Sizhui wondered, "Why did he spend so much effort leading us to Yi City?"

Wei Wuxian said, "We still don't know. But, after this, please be careful. If you run into such strange things again, don't go tracking them down alone. First, contact your sects and work together with a large group of people. If not for how Hanguang-Jun also happened to be at Yi City, you might've even died."

"Not only Hanguang-Jun, but you as well Senior Wei!"

"Yeah, you two worked together in solving Xue Yang. It was amazing!"

With the juniors praising Wei Wuxian once again, the sect leaders and other elders who held grudges against the Yiling Patriarch looked green in the face, unable to say anything to refute

or discredit Wei Wuxian for saving their disciples. However, this didn't stop some of them from badmouthing him.

"He's acting like a well-respected senior when it was Hanguang-Jun who had done all the fighting."

"He's just being kind to the juniors because they're easier to brainwash."

"Watch. He'll show his true colors eventually."

As it grew dark, they all finally arrived at the city where the dog and donkey had been placed.

The city was not only brightly lit but also filled with the chatter of people.

Everyone in the cave felt as if the gloom and despair from Yi City had finally disappeared, and many breathed a sigh of relief.

Wei Wuxian extended his arms toward the donkey and shouted, "Lil' Apple!"

Lil' Apple brayed as though it was mad. Immediately, Wei Wuxian heard the barks of a dog. He darted behind Lan Wangji at once. Fairy had also rushed over. The dog and the donkey stood on opposite sides and snarled at each other.

Lan Wangji said, "Leash it. It is time to eat."

Dragging Wei Wuxian, who was almost glued to his back, he walked toward the second floor, following the tea servant. Jin Ling and the rest wanted to follow, yet Lan Wangji turned around and gave them an obscure glance.

Tang Tang giggled. "They're like little chicks following their parents, but now it's time for the parents to have their alone time."

Fei Fei nodded, looking forward to it. Hopefully, there wouldn't be any more depressing scenes after what they'd all just witnessed.

Lan Sizhui immediately told the others, "The elders' and the juniors' rooms should be separated. We can stay on the first floor."

Wei Wuxian grinned. "Our A-Yuan just understands you instantly, Lan Zhan."

"He is very clever." Lan Wangji agreed. It saved him many times from needing to elaborate himself.

Lan Wangji nodded and continued to walk up, his face as detached as always. Jin Ling stood on the stairs hesitantly, unsure of whether to go up or down.

Wei Wuxian turned around and grinned, "The adults and the children should be separated. It's best if you don't see some of the things that happen."

Jin Ling's lips twitched, "Who'd want to see that!"

“Yeah, I don’t want to see anything!" Jin Ling agreed with his past self, blushing furiously.

"But isn’t this following Senior Wei’s perspective? Wouldn't we eventually see something we shouldn't again?” Lan Jingyi asked hesitantly.

Wei Wuxian had also been worried about this but a part of him was hoping that whoever had set them up here wouldn’t just blatantly reveal his intimate life to everyone in the cultivation world. Lan Wangji held his hand tightly and squeezed it with reassurance. He whispered to Wei Wuxian, "If needed, I will ask everyone to look away."

"But they also have ears, Lan Zhan!" Wei Wuxian said, knowing just how loud he was in bed.

"...then cover their ears too."

Lan Wangji told a servant to prepare one table downstairs for the group of disciples and a private room upstairs for Wei Wuxian and him. The two sat across from each other.

Wei Wuxian said, "Hanguang-Jun, listen to me. Please don't have your sect handle all of the aftermath of Yi City alone. It's such a big city. If you really want to tidy the place up, it'd cost you a lot in terms of many aspects. It'll be quite difficult. Shuzhong isn't under the administration of the Gusu Lan Sect anyways. Count the disciples downstairs and see which sects they came from. Add their sects up as well. Those sects should also help you."

Lan Wangji nodded, "I will consider it."

Wei Wuxian added more advice to not let their sect be taken advantage of by others because if they ended up taking care of things too often, they’d be taken for granted.

The sect leaders were not happy to hear Wei Wuxian talk about them as if they were all selfish and lazy.

Wei Wuxian noticed their displeasure and didn't care. They could prove him wrong if they wanted to, but Wei Wuxian wasn't going to have his hopes high.

After a pause, he continued, "But, speaking of it, they really are unlucky. Yi City is too remote and there aren't any lookout towers around it. Or else, Jin Ling, Sizhui, and the rest wouldn't have accidentally barged in. Maiden A-Qing and Daozhang Xiao Xingchen's souls wouldn't have stayed hidden for all these years either."

“Too many sects are unwilling to be stationed at remote areas like Yi City, that’s why a tragedy like this was only uncovered now,” said the rogue cultivator with a sneer on his face.

“It’s impractical when there are so little issues in those areas.” A cultivator in a somewhat big sect argued.

“And yet, when those dwellers in remote places are haunted by evil beings, they can only suffer in silence. Amazing how sects are these days. Reall virtuous and looking out for the people. More like you're all just interested in gaining more power.”

“Who even are you to make comments about our sects?” One elder of a sect questioned with an angry look. He wasn't already happy that the Yiling Patriarch was casting doubt on them, and now this no-named cultivator was throwing insults on their virtue. If only he had his spiritual powers back, he'd teach these brats a lesson!

The rogue cultivator just shrugged his shoulders with a smirk that infuriated the elder. “I’m just a nobody.”

“Hold on, didn’t Jin Guangyao set up more than twelve hundred lookout towers?” Another cultivator said, bringing the topic back.

“I guess there was none in the area of Yi City yet.”

“Or maybe he purposefully didn’t put any there?”

"He was working with Xue Yang, wasn't he?"

"Oh! That might be why he avoided posting lookout towers near Yi City."

Not long later, both the food and the liquor arrived. Wei Wuxian glanced over the table, pretending as if he didn't mean it. Almost all of the dishes were covered in red. Paying attention to Lan Wangji's chopsticks, he notes that he ate mostly from the milder dishes, rarely the bright-red ones. Even when he did, his expression remained the exact same. Wei Wuxian felt something tug at his heart.

Lan Jingyi shuddered at the sight of all the red food while feeling impressed that Hanguang-Jun could eat that with a straight face. "I don't know how he does it. I would have died on the first bite from all that spice."

"It's the power of love, Jingyi. You wouldn't understand." Ouyang Zizhen explained like a wise elder.

Having noticed his gaze, Lan Wangji asked, "What is wrong?"

Wei Wuxian slowly poured himself a cup of liquor, "I want somebody to drink with me."

Chapter End Notes

Because this is where the chapter in the novel ended, I’m ending this here as well ^w^; the long-awaited second drunk lwj is next! Can't believe we're at 50 chapters already but here we ar

Kind and motivating comments are greatly appreciated while comments urging me to rush may slow me down further so thank you to everyone who has continued to be patient with me! <3

Allure - I

Chapter Notes

> Happy Birthday Wei Wuxian!!!
>
> Ngl, the longer I'm on hiatus with this fic, the harder it is for me to remember the reactions I've already written (and also recalling the story), so I've tried to reread my fic many times and holy shit, I dunno why but I just can't XD All the comments I receive saying that they've reread this fic for the nth time, I'm just like "how?!?" I hate rereading my works hahaha you guys are amazing, thank you so much for sticking so long with this fic <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Oh heavens…”

“Not again!”

“You gave him a drink despite knowing how unpredictable drunk Hanguang-Jun is?!”

Wei Wuxian shifted nervously in his seat, aware that this time around, it wasn't going to be as tame as the first one.

But…but still not as bad as what happened the third time!

“Wei Ying.”

Wei Wuxian jolted straight while seated. “Yes, Lan Zhan?”

Lan Wangji looked at him with those all too piercing eyes. “Should I be worried?”

“Uh… haha, Lan Zhan, it's not *that* bad. Promise. It's only a little embarrassing, and maybe a little uncharacteristic of you...and you-you *did* release some chickens in the dead of night so…”

Lan Wangji turned his attention back to the screen. “So I should be worried then.”

He never actually expected Lan Wangji to drink with him, and simply finished the liquor in his own cup. However, staring silently at him, Lan Wangji gently swept his own sleeves aside. He poured a cup for himself as well and, after a pause, he slowly downed the liquor.

Wei Wuxian was quite surprised, "Hanguang-Jun, you really are considerate, aren't you? You're really gonna drink with me?"

The last time they drank together, Wei Wuxian didn't pay much attention to Lan Wangji's expression. This time, however, he went out of his way to scrutinize it.

Lan Wangji closed his eyelids when he drank. With a faint frown, he finished the liquor, and only opened his eyes again after subtly pursing up his lips. A blanket of mist even seemed to have fallen over his eyes.

Resting his chin in his hand, Wei Wuxian started to count in silence. When he reached ten, Lan Wangji predictably closed his eyes and leaned his forehead against his hand. 'As I thought, he always falls asleep before he gets drunk. Impressive!' Wei Wuxian thought excitedly.

"How does he not realize his own feelings when it's crystal clear in the way he's watching Lan Wangji right now?!" Tang Tang murmured to her friends.

"Yeah, look at that blush, those sultry eyes!" Fei Fei replied with a giggle.

"This is starting to make me blush too." Ling Bao touched his warm cheeks.

For some unknown reason, he was starting to feel a bit eager. Finishing all of the leftover liquor in one gulp, Wei Wuxian stood up and paced around the room, his hands folded behind him. After a while, he walked toward Lan Wangji, bent down, and whispered in his ear, "Lan Zhan?"

There was no reply. Wei Wuxian continued, "Wangji-xiong?"

Lan Wangji was leaning his head on his right hand. His breathing was calmer than ever.

Both his features and the hand at his forehead were impeccably fair in color. He looked as if he was a piece of fine jade.

'What's that smell?' Wei Wuxian leaned closer to Lan Wangji. 'It's his cold sandalwood scent entwined with that alcohol. It's slightly intoxicating, as though a saccharine whisp had wound its way through.'

'Strange… Why is it starting to feel a bit hot in here?'

Not only was the current Wei Wuxian feeling hot, but the rest of the cultivators were fidgeting and flushing from second-hand embarrassment.

A young man from the Nie sect told his martial brothers, "I can't believe none of the books I've read on the Yiling Patriarch said what a love-sick fool he was."

"Or that he was hopelessly oblivious to his own feelings."

"It would have made him a lot less scarier."

"Yeah, then my mother wouldn't have had to always bring up his name to scare me."

Many of them nodded while Nie Huaisang laughed behind his fan. “Yes, why didn't I think of that?”

The Nie cultivators looked towards their Sect Leader with surprise and hope. “Sect Leader!”

Lan Wangji found himself slightly smiling at the smitten look on Wei Wuxian’s face. It made him want to kiss his husband dearly. Why hadn't his drunken self taken the initiative then? Maybe they would have been together a lot sooner.

Though there was a possibility that Wei Wuxian would have talked himself into misunderstanding Lan Wangji's actions again. He was starting to have a good understanding as to how severely he underestimated Wei Wuxian's emotional intelligence. As Lan Wangji learned, bold and direct were the best ways to court his husband.

“Lan Zhan, why do you look so pleased with yourself? Do you like seeing how infatuated I am for you?” Wei Wuxian whispered coyly.

“Mm. Like.”

Amid the fusion of liquor and sandalwood, his face inched nearer and nearer to Lan Wangji, while he himself didn't notice it at all. His voice had lowered as well.

“Senior Wei! Should we be allowed to look at this?!”

“I've already covered my eyes.”

“A-Are they going to k-kiss?”

“Shut up, Zizhen!”

“Senior Wei, how could you take advantage of Hanguang-Jun like this!”

The juniors began complaining one by one with some covering their eyes while others were still peeking through their fingers.

“Take advantage?!” Wei Wuxian mock-gasped. “Have you forgotten all the times Lan Zhan had taken advantage of me?!”

The juniors looked at Wei Wuxian with faces that said ‘but you deserved it’. Wei Wuxian had never felt more betrayed.

On the other hand, Lan Qiren had learned that if he mentally recited Lan scriptures with his eyes closed, he could to some extent block out the things Wei Wuxian was saying about his nephew. Oh, how he wished he had just stayed in Cloud Recesses and been blissfully ignorant to all of this.

In an almost teasing manner, he murmured, "Second… Bro–"

Suddenly, a voice entered his ears, "Young Master…"

Startled by the sound, Wei Wuxian almost fell onto the ground with a slip of his feet.

“Oh,” Lan Sizhui breathed a sigh of relief.

“Ghost General to the rescue!” Lan Jingyi whooped. Meanwhile, Wen Ning wasn't quite sure if what he did was good since he seemed to have interrupted something intimate between Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji.

“Can't believe I'm saying that I'm glad to see him,” Jin Ling huffed while patting his chest.

Ouyang Zizhen sighed, almost as if he sounded disappointed. “Maybe next time.”

The juniors looked at him suspiciously.

“W-What? Can't I hope that they will get together as soon as possible?”

Jin Ling snorted knowingly. “It’s going to take much longer than that.”

Meanwhile, in a certain group, three girls and one guy expressed their own disappointment over the sudden interruption of what they considered was a sizzling romantic moment.

Liu Dazhong laughed at their sullen expressions. “You are all acting as if we're listening in on a teahouse story.”

Li Li scoffed at her brother. “This is even better than those teahouse stories. It's real!”

“And we can see with our own eyes how their love is blooming!” Tang Tang said with a dramatic wave of her arms.

He immediately positioned himself in front of Lan Wangji. Then, he turned to the wooden windows of where the voice came from.

A careful knock could be heard through the windows, then a small voice drifted through the slit, "Young Master…"

Wei Wuxian finally noticed that his heart was beating a bit too fast. He puzzled over it again, then regained his composure.

“Oh, he reminds me of myself when I was shy around my favorite senior. I couldn't understand these strange feelings inside me,” A female cultivator commented with a fond smile.

“He is surprisingly relatable when it comes to matters of love,” One of her female companions noted.

“I thought for sure the Yiling Patriarch was the type to just take after what he wanted. Wasn't that what the rumors said?”

“Right? He's like a young foolish maiden who is too dense to see his own true feelings,” another replied with a fan to cover her laughter.

Walking over, he opened the window to see a black-clothed figure dangling upside-down with legs hung at the roof. It was Wen Ning.

The two stayed like this, one standing, one hanging, and stared at each other for a few moments.

Wei Wuxian said, "Come down."

With a sudden loss of balance, Wen Ning fell and slammed onto the ground outside the inn.

The juniors, who were thrown by such an unexpected act by the Ghost General, suddenly burst into laughter.

“I-I'm sorry, Ghost General! That was just too funny.” Lan Jingyi chortled, not really doing his best to hold back his laughter.

“Ehem, hm hm, ehem, t-that wasn't funny. You're too easily amused, Jingyi.” Jin Ling said, attempting to cover his own mirth with coughs.

Lan Sizhui smothered his giggles and patted a confused Wen Ning's arm.

Wei Wuxian wiped away the nonexistent sweat on his forehead. ‘We really chose the right place!’

For the sake of tranquility, the windows of the private room faced a small grove instead of the streets. Using the support pole, Wei Wuxian left the windows open and looked down, leaning outside. With his heavy body, Wen Ning made a man-shaped dent on the ground. He was still staring at Wei Wuxian even as he lay in the dent.

In a hushed voice, Wei Wuxian shouted at him, "I told you to come down, not go down. 'Come', you understand?"

Wen Ning looked up at him. Dusting off his clothes, he crawled out of the dent and hurried to reply, "Oh. I'm coming."

As soon as he finished, he clung to a pillar and prepared to climb. Wei Wuxian interrupted him at once, "Stop! Stay where you are. I'll come get you."

The juniors started chuckling again.

“The Ghost General is actually pretty funny.”

“It seems when he's not fighting, he just looks foolish and naive.”

“He's adorable!” said a female junior cultivator. “An adorable idiot.”

“Hey, hey, careful who you’re calling an idiot.” Her friend whispered to her while looking warily at the Ghost General near them.

The female junior cultivator waved her away with a laugh. “Why are you still so scared? It’s obvious the Ghost General is friendly to us.”

Her friend, who had heard a ton of rumors from the Jin sect about the Ghost General, still couldn’t let down her guard on a long time monster of her nightmares.

He returned to Lan Wangji and leaned down toward his ears, "Lan Zhan, oh, Lan Zhan. Please sleep for a while longer. I'll be back before you know it. Won't you be a good boy?"

After he spoke, he felt a strange urge. He couldn't help but brush the tip of his finger against Lan Wangji's eyelashes.

In a slight manner, Lan Wangji's lashes trembled and his brows twitched. He looked rather perturbed.

Lan Wangji raised a brow and turned to Wei Wuxian who was smiling sheepishly at him.

“I see you've ‘taken advantage’ again.”

Wei Wuxian whined. “How could I be taking advantage when you already liked me since then?”

Lan Wangji hummed. “I'll decide your punishment later.”

Wei Wuxian blinked. “Eh? Punishment? Lan Zhan, I only touched your–”

“In the bedroom.” Lan Wangji suddenly leaned in and whispered into his ear.

Wei Wuxian’s face was cherry red and he went silent after that.

Removing his hand, Wei Wuxian leaped out the window. He hopped a few times on the branches by the roof, then landed on the ground. Right after he turned around, Wen Ning kneeled down in front of him.

Wei Wuxian asked, "What are you doing?"

Wen Ning said nothing, his head hanging low.

Wei Wuxian asked again, "Do you really have to talk to me like this?"

Wen Ning lowered his voice, "Young Master, I'm sorry."

Wei Wuxian started, "Well then."

Immediately after he spoke, he kneeled in front of Wen Ning as well. Startled, Wen Ning proceeded to kowtow to him, while Wei Wuxian soon returned the kowtow as well.

“What am I looking at?” Jiang Cheng said with a shake of his head.

Wei Weuxian just waved his hand nonchalantly. “We're greeting each other after a long time. Don’t mind it.”

Lan Jingyi snorted. “It looks funny, though.”

Wen Ning was so alarmed that he jumped up at once. Only then did Wei Wuxian stand up again, sweeping off the dirt at his hems, "You could've just stood straight and talked to me, you know?"

Wen Ning was still looking at the ground, afraid to say anything. Wei Wuxian asked, "When did you regain consciousness?"

Wen Ning replied, "Just a while ago."

Wei Wuxian asked if Wen Ning still remembered the things that happened when the nails were in his head and Wen Ning said only some. He knew that he’d been chained in a really dark place and there were people who came to check on him sometimes. He couldn’t recall who they were though.

“Must be Xue Yang.” Jin Ling sneered.

Lan Jingyi nodded. “Yeah, he was also using nails to control Song Lan.”

“It could be because he was ordered to by Jin Guangyao. He used to be a guest cultivator at Lanling Jin sect, right?” Lan Sizhui said thoughtfully.

Wei Wuxian grinned. “That’s right.”

Wei Wuxian continued, "Most likely, it was out of the LanlingJin Sect's wishes. Back then, they all said that you'd been completely annihilated. If the LanlingJin Sect didn't take part in this, he wouldn't have been able to hide the truth all on his own." With a pause, he asked again, "Then, what happened afterwards? How did you go to Dafan Mountain?"

Wen Ning told him, "Afterwards, I don't know how long had passed, but I suddenly heard someone clap, and then, Young Master, you said 'wake up,' so I… struggled out of the chains and rushed outside…"

“Eh?” Lan Jingyi tilted his head. “When did Senior Wei–”

“Oh! That time in Mo Village! When he animated the three fierce corpses.” Lan Sizhui said while thumping a fist to his palm.

Jin Ling’s eyes widened. “He just woke up from that?”

“Master Wei is that powerful.” Wen Ning quietly said, smiling awkwardly at the juniors when they looked his way. “He’s given me countless commands in the past so i-it’s only natural that I heard the first command he gave after he came back.”

As he said that, the screen showed Wen Ning’s escape from Lanling Jin sect and how the sect could not pursue him.

“Well, of course, they couldn’t do anything about it.” A Sect Leader stated huffily. “Their reputation would be damaged and it would cause mass panic.”

“Not like it’s any better now.” Another Sect Leader muttered, shooting the area where the Lanling Jin sect with a disdainful look. However, they were still a major sect so he couldn’t openly be disrespectful to them.

After a mess of a journey, Wen Ning finally reached Wei Wuxian, who was playing the flute on top of Dafan Mountain, and the two successfully met again.

Wei Wuxian sighed, "You said that you 'don't know how long had passed'. It's already been more than ten years." He continued after a short pause, "Well, it's fair to say that I don't know much more than you do. Do you want me to tell you some of the things that happened?"

Wen Ning said, "I heard that the Burial Mounds are gone, that everyone… is gone."

Wei Wuxian’s eyes widened.

Lan Sizhui clenched his hands into fists and looked down, feeling complicated.

After a moment of silence, Wei Wuxian asked again, "What else have you heard?"

Wen Ning whispered, "Sect Leader Jiang, Jiang Cheng, brought a siege upon the Burial Mounds. And he killed you."

Wei Wuxian waved his hand. "I'll have to clarify this one. He didn't kill me. I died from the backlash of the Stygian Tiger Seal."

Wen Ning finally looked up at him. "But, Sect Leader Jiang clearly…"

Wei Wuxian sighed, "Nobody can walk safely on a single-plank bridge for their whole life. It couldn't be helped."

“Wait, it really wasn’t because of Sect Leader Jiang?” A male cultivator whispered to his companion, confused.

“I heard that too. And Sect Leader Jiang never refuted it.”

Sect Leader Yao looked at Sect Leader Jiang with a look of bewilderment. “Is that true Sect Leader Jiang?” Sect Leader Yao had also been at the siege but he hadn’t seen the actual death of the Yiling Patriarch.

Jiang Cheng had a small scowl on his face. “His death still lies with me. It matters not if I landed the killing blow.” The cultivators around him exchanged glances, somewhat understanding why someone would want to take credit for the death of an evil cultivator but this seemed more complicated than that.

Wei Wuxian chose not to comment except for a helpless sigh.

Wei Wuxian ended the conversation, "Okay. Let's not talk about him anymore. Have you heard of anything else?"

"Yes." Wen Ning gazed at him, "Young Master Wei, you died such an awful death."

"..." Looking at how miserable he was, Wei Wuxian sighed, "So you haven't heard any good news?"

Wen Ning frowned, "No. There hasn't been any."

"..." Wei Wuxian was speechless.

Lan Wangji didn't like this conversation at all. The news of Wei Wuxian's death was the worst thing he'd ever heard ever since his mother passed away.

Seeming to pick up on his mood, Wei Wuxian patted Lan Wangji's hand and smiled at him. "There, there, Lan Zhan. It will get more amusing soon."

Suddenly, a loud shattering noise came from the main hall of the first floor. Lan Sizhui's voice followed, "Were we not talking about Xue Yang? Why are we now arguing over this?"

Jin Ling said, "We are talking about Xue Yang. Was what I said wrong? What did Xue Yang do? He's worse than scum and Wei Ying was even more disgusting than him! What do you mean 'we shouldn't generalize them'? These monsters are vermin to our world! We should kill, murder, and slaughter every single one of them!"

Jin Ling suddenly coughed and choked on his saliva, patting his chest as he looked away from the screen. Sizhui could see that his ears were very red.

Lan Jingyi snorted. "I remember this. Look at you and your big mouth now."

Jin Ling turned around and gritted his teeth. "I didn't know he was listening in! And it's not as if you haven't talked behind his back either!"

"N-Not as much as you did!" Lan Jingyi said, sweating nervously.

Lan Sizhui made a calming gesture with his hands. "Alright. Calm down."

Wen Ning flinched. Wei Wuxian gestured for him to stay still. On the other side, Lan Jingyi joined in as well, "Why are you being so angry about it? Sizhui did not say that Wei Wuxian should not have been killed. He just said that not everyone who cultivates the ghost path is the same type of person as Xue Yang. Did you have to throw things? I did not get to eat that one yet..."

Jin Ling sneered, "Didn't he also say that 'the founder of this path may not have intended harm with it'? Who was 'the founder of this path'? Go on, tell me, who else could it be except for Wei Ying?! I just can't seem to understand you. Your Gusu Lan Sect is also a prominent sect, and back then you also lost quite a number of people in Wei Ying's hands, didn't you? Was it hard, killing all those corpses and whatnot that were under his control? Lan Yuan, why are you speaking from such a strange standpoint? From the way you talk, don't tell me that you're making excuses for Wei Ying!"

"People who have not experienced these moments have no right to speak about them so righteously," Lan Zhan, already in a bad mood, said. The juniors shivered under his chilly glare and Jin Ling blanched the most.

“M-My apologies—”

“Now hold on a moment, Hanguang-Jun.” A sect leader cut off Jin Ling as he was apologizing. “What the boy says is not technically false. The Gusu Lan sect have also suffered under the hands of the Yiling Patriarch or do you wish to remain ignorant to your own fallen clansmen?”

Lan Wangji was silent for a moment before he turned his head, showing a cold side-profile. “It’s useless to explain. Just keep quiet and watch.”

“Wha-what?! That doesn’t answer my question, Hanguang-Jun!”

“What my brother means is that explanations are not as good as watching the scenes for yourself to make your own judgment on the matter.” Lan Xichen stepped in with a smile, smoothing Lan Wangji’s brusque words. “Moreover, all that has happened is in the past. Gusu Lan sect holds no hatred for Wei Wuxian and the Cloud Recesses is now his home.”

The sect leader clicked his tongue, the disapproval on his face showing clearly how he felt about that. He muttered under his breath, “More like they can’t do anything about it when Hanguang-Jun is infatuated with that monster.”

Lan Yuan was Lan Sizhui's birth name. He protested, "I was not making excuses for him. I was simply suggesting that we may not want to make conclusions before we understand the entire situation. You know, before we came to Yi City, a lot of people also claimed that the Yueyang Chang Clan's Chang Ping was killed by Daozhang Xiao Xingchen for revenge, right? But what was the truth?"

Wei Wuxian sighed happily, breaking the tense mood. “A-Yuan is so smart and thoughtful. He really is my favorite radish.”

Lan Sizhui blushed under the compliment but he was smiling from Senior Wei’s praise.

Lan Wangji nodded with a mild look of approval and pride.

Jin Ling countered, "Nobody actually saw whether or not Chang Ping was killed by Daozhang Xiao Xingchen. All they had were guesses, so why are you calling them claims? Just try and count how many cultivators lost their lives to Wei Ying, to Wen Ning, to the Tiger Seal during the battles at the Qiongqi Path and the Nightless Day! These are truths that everyone accepts, that nobody can deny! And what else I'll never forget is that he ordered Wen Ning to kill my father and mother!"

Jin Ling’s words had a profound effect on the cultivators as they remembered once again why the Yiling Patriarch was a feared figure in their world. A lot of them were starting to forget that the more they watched and related with Wei Wuxian.

“He just seems so… human though,” A female cultivator said doubtfully.

“Maybe because he’s been born in a new body that is not contaminated with so much resentful energy, he’s not as evil as he was once before,” Her friend explained with a

thoughtful hum.

“Then Wei Wuxian should stop using demonic cultivation, right?” A male cultivator jumped into their conversation to say.

Hearing their words, Liu Dazhong sighed. “I don’t think it’s as simple as that. Wei Wuxian is clearly kind and would do anything to save the people he loves. I think I would hold off judgment until everything else plays through.”

If Wen Ning had a single trace of blood in his complexion, it would've already drained out of his face.

He breathed, "... Maiden Jiang's son?"

Wei Wuxian stayed still.

Jin Ling continued, "My uncle grew up with him, my grandfather saw him as his own child, my grandmother wasn't horrible to him either, but what did he do? He made Lotus Pier the lair of the Wen Sect, he wrecked the entire Yunmeng Jiang Sect, he caused the deaths of both my parents and grandparents, and now my uncle is the only one left! He brought about his own death through the havoc he created and ended up leaving not even a whole corpse behind him! Just which part of the entire situation do you not understand? Just what excuses are you still making for him?!"

Wei Wuxian bowed his head. Hearing this a second time didn’t make him feel any better. “...he still blamed me for their deaths, huh?”

He wasn’t talking about Jin Ling but the man who clearly told him all the misdeeds he had done on their family. Wei Wuxian sighed.

Jin Ling must have thought Wei Wuxian was talking about him. “I… I know a lot of what happened back then must have been a misunderstanding but…can I know how they really died?”

“Jin Ling.”

Jiang Cheng was staring him down with a stern look. Jin Ling pursed his lips and looked down disgruntledly.

Wei Wuxian smiled sadly at Jin Ling. “If this device shows most of my memories, then you might find out sooner or later, though I hope not.” He truly dreaded some of the things that might be shown from his past life. There are just some experiences during his days as the Yiling Patriarch that he didn’t want Lan Wangji or Jiang Cheng to know.

He argued forcefully, while Lan Sizhui didn't reply at all. A moment later, another boy spoke up, "Why are we suddenly getting so heated over such a thing? Let's just drop the subject, alright? We haven't finished eating yet. The food's gonna go cold."

Wei Wuxian thought, judging from the voice, he was the "sentimental" one that Wei Wuxian poked fun at.

Ouyang Zizhen squawked. “Were you poking fun at me, Senior Wei? When?”

Wei Wuxian chuckled into his hand. “No. Never.”

Someone else agreed, "ZiZhen is right. We should stop arguing. Sizhui simply forgot to choose his words carefully. It was only an offhand comment—how could he have thought about so much? Sit down, Young Master Jin. Let us continue to eat."

"That's right. All of us had just left Yi City, so technically we've already been through life and death together… We really shouldn't argue over such a careless mistake."

Jin Ling snorted. Lan Sizhui finally responded, his tone as polite as ever, "I am sorry. I should have put more thought to my wording. Young Master Jin, please sit back down. We would not want to continue and bring Hanguang-Jun down here as well."

Immediately, Jin Ling stopped, not even making another noise.

“Ahh, mentioning Hanguang-Jun was a splendid move, A-Yuan.” Wei Wuxian snickered.

“He didn’t want to risk getting silenced again.” Lan Jingyi was also grinning in amusement.

The hall quickly refilled with clamor, and the boys' voices were soon drowned out by the clinks of bowls and dishes. However, Wei Wuxian and Wen Ning still stood silently in the grove, their expressions stern.

Without making a sound, Wen Ning kneeled down again. Wei Wuxian only noticed him after a short pause. Waving his hand weakly, he responded, "It wasn't your fault."

“It was.” Wen Ning quietly answered what he hadn’t been able to say back then. Lan Sizhui silently patted his relative’s knee.

Jin Ling clenched his hands into his fists and resolutely didn’t look at the Ghost General.

Just as Wen Ning was about to open his mouth again, he suddenly looked behind Wei Wuxian and hesitated. Before Wei Wuxian could turn around, a white-robed figure walked past him and kicked Wen Ning's shoulder.

Almost every cultivator gasped at the sight of Hanguang-Jun kicking the Ghost General all of a sudden.

Wen Ning created another man-shaped dent in the ground.

Wei Wuxian hurried to pull back Lan Wangji, who seemed as though he wanted to kick again, "Hanguang-Jun, Hanguang-Jun! Calm down!"

The situation felt somewhat familiar—history really did repeat itself, didn't it? However, this time, Lan Wangji looked even more normal than last time. He didn't wear his boots wrong, either. Even when he rudely kicked over Wen Ning, his expression was still perfectly righteous. Nobody could find any fault with him. After Wei Wuxian pulled him back, he fixed his sleeves and nodded. He stood proudly where he was, stopping himself from kicking again.

Tang Tang couldn't help but 'pffft' into her hand. "Has Jealous Hanguang-Jun struck again?"

"Ah, the look on Hanguang-Jun's face." Ling Bao was chuckling as well.

The only one confused was Liu Dazhong who couldn't understand why the group started tittering like crazy.

Wei Wuxian used the time to ask Wen Ning, "How are you?"

Wen Ning replied, "I'm fine."

Wei Wuxian said, "If you're fine then stand up! What are you still kneeling for?"

Wen Ning crawled up and hesitated, "Young Master Lan."

Lan Wangji scrunched his brows and covered his ears. He then turned around with his back toward Wen Ning. Facing Wei Wuxian, he used his own body to block their eye contact.

Lan Qiren pressed a hand to his forehead while Lan Xichen had his brows raised in amusement. He was seeing more and more entertaining sides of his brother.

Meanwhile, the juniors had no idea how to react to such a childish Hanguang-Jun.

Wei Wuxian chortled. "And Drunk Hanguang-Jun strikes again!"

Lan Wangji sighed, looking as if he wasn't going to enjoy the next couple of moments.

Wen Ning, "..."

Wei Wuxian said, "It's best if you don't stand there. Lan Zhan, uh, doesn't really like seeing you."

Wen Ning asked, "... What happened to Young Master Lan?"

Wei Wuxian shrugged, "Nothing much. He's just drunk."

"What?" Wen Ning's face was blank, as though he couldn't accept such a thing. After a while, he finally continued, "Then… what are you going to do?"

Lan Sizhui tilted his head. "Wait a minute, does this mean Hanguang-Jun was drunk when he…"

Lan Jingyi yelled out an "ah!" when he realized what Lan Sizhui was hinting at. Jin Ling's eyes widened and the rest of the juniors who remembered what they saw began connecting the dots.

"No wonder he was acting so weird." Ouyang Zizhen said with a contemplative look. Lan Jingyi elbowed him on the side.

"Don't say that in front of his face, idiot!"

Wei Wuxian said, "Well, what can I do? I'm gonna carry him inside and tuck him in."

Lan Wangji actually agreed, "Okay."

Fei Fei squealed. “He said yes right away. How cute!”

Li Li giggled. “I’m sure Hanguang-Jun drunk would agree to anything Wei Wuxian asked.”

“And even if he did that, Wei Wuxian still wouldn’t realize Lan Wangji’s feelings for him.” Ling Bao countered with a sigh.

Liu Dazhong smiled. “For all of his wit and intelligence, the Yiling Patriarch’s tendency to misunderstand is astounding.”

“It’s a good thing our Bao Bao is emotionally smart. Right, Zhong Zhong?” Tang Tang said as Ling Bao stuttered and blushed red beside her while Liu Dazhong looked confused over his new nickname.

Wei Wuxian replied, "Hmm? Aren't you covering your ears? How come you're suddenly able to hear me again?"

This time, Lan Wangji refused to answer, pretending that the one who interrupted them a moment ago wasn't him. Wei Wuxian turned to Wen Ning and told him to leave and hide first.

After he left, Wei Wuxian took away the hands that Lan Wangji blocked his ears with, "Alright. He's gone. You can't hear or see him anymore."

Lan Wangji finally let go of his own ears. He stared blankly at Wei Wuxian with the pair of light-colored eyes. His eyes were so clear, so honest that a desire for mischief surged through Wei Wuxian. He smiled teasingly, "Lan Zhan, you're still gonna answer whatever I ask? Do whatever I tell you to?"

“There he goes. And he says he doesn’t take advantage.” Lan Jingyi snorted.

Wei Wuxian pouted petulantly. "But I didn't even get to do anything! Lan Zhan just did whatever he wanted with me!"

"H-He did what?!"

“Please spare me the details.” Jiang Cheng begged, his eyes to the ceiling as if some deity could hear him.

Lan Wangji, "Mnn."

Wei Wuxian said, "Take off your forehead ribbon."

Obediently, Lan Wangji reached behind his head and slowly untied the strands. He took off the white forehead ribbon, which had been sewn with the motif of drifting clouds.

Holding the ribbon in his hands, Wei Wuxian turned it over a few times, examining every angle of it, "So there really isn't anything so special about it, is there? And I thought that it's hiding some sort of a gigantic secret. Back then, though, why were you so mad when I took it off?" Or perhaps the past Lan Wangji simply hated him, alongside everything that he did?

“All this time making him copy those rules and he still doesn’t know.” Lan Qiren grumbled under his breath. Lan Xichen silently chuckled beside him.

Suddenly, he felt something tighten at his wrists. Lan Wangji had tied both of his hands together using the forehead ribbon and was starting to make knots over it.

Wei Wuxian looked confused. "What are you doing?"

Lan Xichen, looking as if he might cry from laughter but was too dignified to, said, “It seems he wanted to tie you to his side early on.”

“I-I see.” Wei Wuxian stuttered, realizing what an idiot he must look to the Lan cultivators. “Lan Zhan, you should have just used your words! Just say ‘Marry me’ so that I know how you really feel.”

Lan Wangji raised a brow. “I was not sure that you wouldn’t run away again. Also, I was drunk.”

He wanted to see what exactly Lan Wangji wanted to do, so he let him continue. After Lan Wangji secured his hands together, he first tied a simple knot. He thought for a while and, as though he felt that something wasn't quite right, he changed it to a tighter knot. He then thought about it some more, still unsatisfied, and tied another knot on top.

“He’s tying Wei Wuxian up! He’s tying Wei Wuxian up! Ahhh!” Tang Tang was bodily shaking Fei Fei who offered no resistance.

If this wasn't saying that he wanted to tie Wei Wuxian down, she didn't know what!

Even a couple of the other female cultivators were blushing as they watched this scene.

Lan Wangji tied seven or eight knots on the ribbon, forming a stack of small, ugly-looking lumps, and finally felt pleased enough to stop.

Wei Wuxian asked, "Hey, do you still want this ribbon of yours?"

Lan Wangji's frown dissolved. Holding onto the other end of the forehead ribbon, he lifted Wei Wuxian's hands in front of himself, as though he was admiring what a masterpiece he had just created. With his hands suspended in the air, Wei Wuxian thought to himself, ‘I probably look a lot like a criminal right now… Wait, why am I playing with him like this? Wasn't I supposed to be the one playing him?’

“You see! Even if he’s drunk, he still manages to take advantage of me!” Wei Wuxian pointed to the screen while ranting to the juniors.

Lan Jingyi rolled his eyes. "Well, whose fault is it that Hanguang-Jun is like that in the first place?" Lan Sizhui nodded in agreement.

Wei Wuxian tried to act innocent. "But he drank it himself willingly..."

Jiang Cheng scowled. "And you think the first time around didn't teach you to not try it again."

Wei Wuxian just laughed it off.

Wei Wuxian finally realized, "Take it off."

Lan Wangji happily reached for his collar and sash, repeating the exact same approach as before. Wei Wuxian shouted, "Don't take this off! Take off the thing on my hands. The thing that you're tying me with. The ribbon."

A chorus of shrieks and squeals echoed in the cave, mostly coming from the female population as well as the juniors.

Wei Wuxian nearly jumped out of his skin. If he didn't know any better, he thought a fierce corpse had popped out of nowhere. "W-What's with this reaction?!"

"They are merely expressing their excitement, Wei-xiong." Nie Huaisang said amusedly from behind his fan.

"No way, I was shouting from horror!" Jin Ling said indignantly. Him and the rest of the juniors had covered their eyes the moment they saw Hanguang-Jun pulling on Wei Wuxian's clothes.

If Lan Wangji not only tied his hands together but also stripped him of his clothes, the scene would be scary beyond belief!

"I apologize, Wei Ying." Lan Wangji said, lowering his eyes in shame.

"N-No! It's not your fault, Lan Zhan! You were drunk and I now understand why you wanted to uhm...and the next time was my fault, right? So it's fine," Wei Wuxian said, his face beet red as he tried to console his husband.

Jiang Cheng looked at them suspiciously. "What do you mean 'next time?' There better not be, Wei Wuxian!"

Lan Xichen felt a foreboding worry for the next time he saw his brother drunk.

Hearing his request, Lan Wangji furrowed his brows again and proceeded to do nothing. Wei Wuxian raised his hands and coaxed, "You said that you'll listen to me, didn't you? Be a good boy and take it off."

Lan Wangji glanced at him, then silently moved his sight away, as though he couldn't understand what Wei Wuxian was saying and had to ponder upon it for a while longer. Wei

Wuxian complained, "Oh, now I get it! You're all hyped if I tell you to tie me up, but you can't understand it if I tell you to take it off. Is that so?"

Wei Wuxian couldn't struggle out of it no matter how hard he tried. He commented in silence, 'I really did shoot myself in the foot, didn't I? Good thing that it's only a forehead ribbon, not some weird magical ropes, or else he would've really tied me up.'

"Who knew Hanguang-Jun would be an...intense lover." A female cultivator commented shyly.

"Right? Tying someone up and removing their clothes in public while drunk. I could never be with someone like that." Another one said with a shudder.

"Oh, please. If someone as handsome as Hanguang-Jun did that to you, you wouldn't be resisting at all." Her childhood friend snorted.

"Y-You're wrong! I would like someone more sophisticated, of course."

"I've seen your hidden spring books. You can't lie to me."

"Yan Yan!" Her friend gasped.

Lan Wangji stared into the distance as he tugged at the ends of the forehead ribbon, contently swinging them around. Wei Wuxian pleaded, "Can you please take it off? Hanguang-Jun, how can someone as graceful as you do such a thing? What's the use of tying me like this? It's gonna look so bad on you if someone sees us like this, right?"

Hearing the last sentence, Lan Wangji started to drag him toward the streets.

Tang Tang guffawed. "Oh, he definitely wants someone to see!"

"Possessive Hanguang-Jun is on the mission!"

Liu Dazhong couldn't help but say, "You guys are really supportive of them, huh?"

"Of course, brother! Their love is so beautiful and tragic and pure!" Li Li exclaimed, her eyes growing intense which made him lean away from her.

Pulled around by Lan Wangji, Wei Wuxian staggered, "W-w-wait a sec. What I meant was that it'd be bad if someone sees this, not that you should let someone see this. Hey! You're just pretending to not understand me, aren't you? Are you doing this on purpose? So you're only gonna understand what you want to understand? Lan Zhan, Lan Wangji!"

Before he even finished speaking, Lan Wangji had already dragged him out of the grove. They walked around onto the street and entered the main hall again through the first floor.

"There's no arguing with Wangji like this." Lan Xichen with an amused shake of his head. "He used to be like this when he was younger."

Lan Wangji pursed his lips and didn't comment. Wei Wuxian smiled as he imagined it and leaned his head on Lan Zhan's shoulder, "That's so cute. You must have been such an adorable kid, Lan Zhan!"

The juniors were still eating and fooling around. They were in the middle of playing a drinking game. Some of the bolder juniors of the Lan Sect wanted to sneak a few sips as well. There would always be somebody watching the stairway that led to the second floor, keeping an eye out for Lan Wangji.

None of them expected that Lan Wangji would suddenly drag Wei Wuxian through the main entrance, where they never paid attention. All of them were shocked after they turned around.

The Lan juniors immediately lowered their eyes as their elders turned to them with disapproving eyes.

Lan Xichen smiled but it looked terrifying to the junior's eyes. "You've seen how Hanguang-Jun is while drunk, would you all like to end up the same?" Of course, not every Lan might end up like his brother but it was better to be safe than sorry.

The Lan juniors immediately shook their heads, stammering apologies and promises that they wouldn't do it again.

As Lan Jingyi hurled himself at the cup of liquor on the table, hoping to cover it up, he knocked over a few bowls and dishes along the way. The object that he wanted to cover up became even more conspicuous. Lan Sizhui stood up, "H-Hanguang-Jun, why have you come inside through this entrance again?"

Wei Wuxian laughed, "Haha. Your Hanguang-Jun was feeling a bit too hot and decided to take a stroll outside so that he could also catch all of you off guard. You see? Here you are, drinking when you're not supposed to."

"Punishment will be dealt with once we're back at the Cloud Recesses." Lan Wangji nodded to Wei Wuxian's words as if he thought he was being serious.

Jin Ling snorted. "Jingyi, you look stupid trying to hide the liquor."

"I don't think you're quite old enough yourself, Jin Ling." Jiang Cheng suddenly said to which Jin Ling paled and stopped talking.

He secretly prayed that Lan Wangji would haul him upstairs directly, without doing or saying anything unnecessary. If he kept silent and maintained the cold appearance, nobody would notice anything wrong with him.

Just as the thought passed through his mind, Lan Wangji dragged him toward the juniors' table.

Jin Ling was nursing his head in a similar fashion to Jiang Cheng. "We really didn't want to be a part of this."

"Now I understand what was going on. It was really terrifying when he showed up at first, so I didn't notice anything odd." Ouyang Zizhen said with a smile.

A couple of the juniors nodded in agreement.

Lan Sizhui was beyond shocked. "Hanguang-Jun, your forehead ribbon…"

Before he could finish his words, he saw Wei Wuxian's hands.

Hanguang-Jun's forehead ribbon was tied around Wei Wuxian's wrists. As though he felt that not enough people noticed this fact, holding the ends of the ribbon, Lan Wangji held up Wei Wuxian's hands and displayed it for everyone to see.

"I have claimed my prize!"

"Please look at my future bride!"

"He's showing off his pretty Wei Ying~!

Tang Tang and the girls jokingly added commentary to what they thought was going through Lan Wangji's mind.

Ling Bao added his own thoughts. "I think he's trying to say 'Look, he's mine.'"

"Ooh, I like that too!"

Chapter End Notes

More drunk lwj to come~

End Notes

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